THE COST OF LOYALTY:
CONTESTING ALLEGIANCES DURING THE CIVIL WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION IN NORTH CAROLINA, 1861-1871

A Thesis
By
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Abstract

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Although receiving some of the most scholarly attention of any historical era, the Civil War and Reconstruction's legacy continues to be actively debated within the profession. In North Carolina, Unionism remained a dominant force until President Abraham Lincoln's April 1861 call for a militia to put down the southern rebellion. Though seemingly united in its secessionist stance in the beginning months of the war, widespread anti-Confederate and Unionist movements emerged across North Carolina, signaling a resurgence in Unionist sentiment. Just six years after hostilities ceased, however, former Confederates retook control of state and local government. Geographically divided between the mountains, piedmont, and coast, North Carolina's culture and economies were diverse, creating a broad spectrum of political loyalty. This thesis will analyze the three regions of North Carolina to represent a microcosm of the entire South. Drawing chiefly from primary source materials in the form of governors papers, newspapers, personal letters, and Southern Claims Commission files, this project reclaims the voices of the common North Carolinian and

identifies the multifaceted reasons for wartime loyalty. Furthermore, this research blurs the line between the war's official end and postwar politics by showing how wartime loyalties affected postwar outcomes.

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Though no amount of writing could truly express my gratitude to all those that aided me in this project, there are a few people that deserve special mention. First, I would like to thank Dr. Bruce Stewart for his guidance and expertise in Appalachian History that aided tremendously in researching western North Carolina. Additionally, Dr. James Goff's sharp and copious edits helped refine this work and I am grateful for the time he spent on my thesis. I would especially like to thank my thesis director, Judkin Browning. As an aimless freshman, Judkin sparked my passion for history and showed me that a career could be made in the field. He pushed me to pursue a Master's degree and gave me nothing but encouragement and his time and energy in helping me complete this project. For his friendship, mentorship, and the example he sets, I am indebted. To my mother Kimberly and my brother Steven, your support has been invaluable. Despite not always understanding what I have been working on, you never doubted my capabilities and have always encouraged me to pursue my goals. I cannot thank you enough. Although countless friends have aided me throughout this journey, Joshua Waddell has undoubtedly earned my thanks. Whether taking my stress-induced phone calls, reading the roughest of drafts, or lending me an ear for ideas, Josh has been with me through every step of this process. I cannot end this list of thanks without acknowledging my dearest friend, Nina Nay. Nina has given me a lifetime's worth of companionship and support and I truly could not have completed this project without her.

Through my graduate years, Nina has kept me on the right track and lifted me up even on my most difficult days. Words alone could never express my appreciation for her.

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Introduction

In July 1870, the Raleigh *Standard* declared, "there is more danger of rebellion now than in 1860." The editor wrote in reflection of widespread Conservative gains in that year's elections, aided by the Ku Klux Klan's violent exploits. "Then," the editor continued, "the [Democrats] talked of Southern rights, while they were plotting treason. Now the Kuklux act treason, while the old leaders mature their plans to restore the 'Lost Cause.'" In 1860, he explained, "the direct attack was upon the old and strong government of the United States; now the new and untried governments must first be crushed out." To do so, former Confederates and the Ku Klux Klan targeted the state's Unionists and African Americans. The writer explained, "the mortification of defeat and the loss of office have engendered a spirit of bitterness and hatred against the Union and Union men. The [Democrats] still desire to 'rule or ruin.'"[1] Written nearly a decade after the start of the Civil War, the article equated the Confederates of 1861 to the Conservatives of 1870. Indeed, the political and social battles of the Reconstruction era played out between the same actors but under different titles and in different forms. Though military fighting ended in 1865, the bitter feelings that existed during the Civil War carried into the ensuing years.

Historians have offered a myriad of interpretations of the Reconstruction era, analyzing the period's relative successes or failures in an attempt to define its legacy. The same situation exists for Civil War scholarship. Few scholars link the Civil War and Reconstruction as a continuous struggle, preferring to treat each as a stand-alone subject. Yet, the course of Reconstruction developed based on specific circumstances arising from the

[1] "No Coercion," Raleigh *Daily Standard,* July 25, 1870, 2.

war. Wartime loyalty was one crucial factor that influenced the course of Reconstruction. At an individual level, one's adherence or opposition to the Union had a direct effect on the course of their life after the war. In North Carolina, the decision to support the national government came with detrimental consequences. North Carolina Unionists formed their allegiances for practical purposes, oftentimes believing the rebellion would only bring them harm. They took a calculated and often dangerous risk to oppose the Confederacy during the war. Though these Unionists chose to align themselves with the winning side of the war, they ultimately received few benefits for this decision.

Understanding the politics of loyalty reveals a new dimension of Reconstruction era politics and expands on the class and race-based factors that historians have documented well. Wartime loyalty served as the measure for how one fared in the postwar years and extended the divisions that pitted neighbors, family, and friends against one another. Unionism, or opposition to the Confederacy, culminated in several ways. Unionists often harbored deserters, guided anti-Confederates to the Federal lines, voted against secessionist politicians or publicly denounced the war and Confederate policies. These actions served as the basis in which local communities treated or interacted with individuals. Secessionists responded to these actions with physical violence or exclusion. Differing loyalties shattered the cooperation and amicable nature of local communities and served as the principle source of the contentious and belligerent nature of Reconstruction. To fully understand Reconstruction politics, scholars must confront the issue of wartime loyalty and its intrusion into the postwar years.

Joseph Grégoire de Roulhac Hamilton wrote the first and, so far, only comprehensive history of Reconstruction in North Carolina in 1914. A student of leading Reconstruction

scholar William A. Dunning at Columbia University, Hamilton argued that a corrupt northern regime trampled the rights of white southerners in favor of an unfit and undeserving class of freedmen. Hamilton took the traditional Lost Cause view – one that conceded the right of secession and accused the North of implementing "Negro rule" over the South.[2] Written over one hundred years ago, Hamilton's simplistic and racist view warrants further scholarly contribution.

More recently, Mark Bradley undertook the study of Reconstruction in North Carolina in his book *Bluecoats and Tarheels* (2009). Focusing on military occupation, Bradley rejected the Dunning School's characterization of the period as one of despotic military rule. In contrast, Bradley posited that the military sought a policy of reconciliation with white southerners, interacting relatively peacefully with locals. He also argued that the U.S. Army played a key role in restoring order, helping African Americans transition to freedom, and stopping Klan violence. They could not, however, create harmonious feelings for white southerners while simultaneously assisting former slaves. Under orders from the Federal government, the army "abandoned the freedpeople for the sake of sectional reconstruction."[3] Although race relations played an important factor in the ultimate failure of Reconstruction, Bradley's failure to confront the nuances of political loyalty and the deep-seated divisions within the state leaves an incomplete picture of the period.

Most, if not all, of the recent scholarship on North Carolina during and after the Civil War consists of regional studies. William T. Auman analyzed the war in the state's central

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[2] Joseph Grégoire de Roulhac Hamilton, *Reconstruction in North Carolina* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1914), 664-667.

[3] Mark L. Bradley, *Bluecoats and Tar Heels: Soldiers and Civilians in Reconstruction North Carolina* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 1, 6, 268.

Piedmont in his book, *Civil War in the North Carolina Quaker Belt* (2014). He shed light on an understudied aspect of the war in North Carolina, namely, the widespread anti-Confederate movement that arose in the region in 1862, following the passage of the Conscription Act. Auman also attributed Piedmont Unionism to anti-slavery feelings rooted in religion, "persistent Whiggery," a growing disaffection with Confederate war policies, and widespread poverty that swept the state. The value in Auman's work is that he identified the multi-faceted reasons for Union sentiment in North Carolina. Furthermore, he detailed the harsh campaign of repression conducted by Confederates that set the standard for the postwar years. The primary shortcoming, however, is that Auman dedicates only two pages to the Reconstruction period, and his regional focus necessarily limits the scope of his findings.[4]

The mountainous region of the state has received the most scholarly attention. John C. Inscoe and Gordon B. McKinney wrote about the wartime experience of mountain residents in *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia* (2003). Attempting to shatter the myths of Appalachia being a bastion of Unionism started by the color-writers of the 1890s, Inscoe and McKinney argued that Unionism was not as pervasive in the region as once thought. Much like Auman, these authors pointed to the practical motivations for Unionism, largely rising from communal concerns. Additionally, Inscoe and McKinney revealed that mountain residents followed state and national trends, rejecting the notion that the region remained isolated until the twentieth century. Because the authors set out to bust popular myths, they

[4] William T. Auman, *Civil War in the North Carolina Quaker Belt: The Confederate Campaign Against Peace Agitators, Deserters, and Draft Dodgers* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2014).

tended to downplay the significance of Unionist feeling in the region and attribute that loyalty to "sheer randomness."[5]

Steven E. Nash picked up where Inscoe and McKinney left off in his book *Reconstruction's Ragged Edge* (2016), studying postwar politics in the mountains. Nash's work was primarily devoted to Appalachian historiography, as he placed western North Carolina's politics within a national conversation about Reconstruction. Because of this, Nash utilized traditional categories of analysis, primarily racial violence, military occupation, Freedman's Bureau efforts, and industrialization. Nash acknowledged that "wartime loyalties were fluid, which meant postwar loyalties were neither fully formed nor predictable," but this definition did not provide the thrust of his analysis.[6] In one chapter, Nash outlined the politics of loyalty in western North Carolina, ultimately concluding that mountain Republicans took control of local politics by utilizing the national government as the means to do so. This thesis will show, however, that mountain Republicans did not enjoy as many successes as Nash implied. Furthermore, Nash's focus on placing the mountains within a national context and his one-region analysis ultimately fails to highlight the regional peculiarities of their postwar experience.

Concerning North Carolina's coast, Judkin Browning studied the effects of military occupation on the inhabitants of Carteret and Craven Counties near the southern edge of the Outer Banks. In *Shifting Loyalties* (2011), he concluded that loyalty was fluid, formed for practical reasons and that "an individual could have multiple loyalties with varying degrees

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[5] John C. Inscoe and Gordon B. McKinney, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia: Western North Carolina in the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

[6] Steven E. Nash, *Reconstruction's Ragged Edge: The Politics of Postwar Life in the Southern Mountains* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 7.

of attachment to each." Browning found that most coastal residents initially expressed a desire to remain in the Union, but they quickly embraced secession after the firing on Fort Sumter in April 1861. Highlighting the ever-changing sentiments in the region, he also showed how the onset of war, arrival of Federal forces, and the implementation of radical policies shifted the political alignment of the region several times. Because Browning honed in on just Carteret and Craven counties, the scope of his findings was limited. The study also ended at 1865 with the cessation of hostilities, leaving room for further study on how these loyalties continued to change, clash, or crystallize during Reconstruction.[7]

Another crucial work in the study of North Carolina during and after the Civil War is Barton Myer's *Rebels Against the Confederacy* (2014). According to Myers, Lost Cause writers in the postwar period, including Zebulon Vance, virtually silenced the presence and existence of Union sentiment in North Carolina. Myers concluded that southern Unionists created an "internal rebellion" within the Confederacy and that local secessionists worked diligently to oppress them. Through threats, violence, and intimidation, Confederates ostracized and subjugated local Unionists during and after the war. Myers appropriately contended that there was not one single defining social characteristic for North Carolina Unionists and that reasons for supporting the government varied.[8]

Although Myers was correct in his analysis of the complexity of Unionism, his source use was flawed. Relying on Southern Claims Commission files for a landscape of Unionism, Myers utilized only the allowed claims while acknowledging that the commissioners were

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[7] Judkin Browning, *Shifting Loyalties: The Union Occupation of Eastern North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 4.

[8] Barton Myers, *Rebels Against the Confederacy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 5, 18, 58.

more likely to reject meritorious claims than accept false claims.[9] He also makes a clear distinction between Confederate dissidents and unconditional Unionists, a distinction that few contemporaries were willing to make. As a result, Myers conducted his study using a nineteenth-century Federal government definition of Unionism. This makes for an inherently biased and rigid definition of Unionism when political loyalties were far more complex. Understanding this flexibility broadens the definition of Unionism as perceived through the eyes of contemporaries. An individual could be a conservative Democrat adhering to the Southern creed of white supremacy while simultaneously opposing secession. Although this individual could be ideologically aligned with his secessionist neighbors, any action or statement made against the Confederacy would be considered synonymous with Unionism or Republicanism. By incorporating rejected claims, the scope of studying political loyalty becomes larger and more complex.

This thesis will correct some of these scholarly shortcomings while expanding on their findings. Through a region-by-region analysis covering the mountains, piedmont, and coast, it becomes clear that the Civil War and Reconstruction unfolded in different ways that were specific to those regions. This study focuses on twelve counties throughout the state--three from the mountains (Ashe, Caldwell, and Wilkes), five from the piedmont (Anson, Chatham, Moore, Union, and Wake), and four from the coastal region (Beaufort, Carteret, Craven, and Edgecombe). I chose the mountain and piedmont counties because they sent men into the 26th North Carolina Regiment. I utilize a database created by Judkin Browning that includes a sample of 1,443 men from that regiment, providing wealth data, service

[9] Myers, *Rebels Against the Confederacy,* 8.

records, and other invaluable insights into the lives of these men.[10] The coastal counties have been selected to reflect the variety of geographic layouts of the region that did much to inform the economic and political cultures of these residents. Carteret County represents a coastline community, while Craven and Beaufort serve as the intracoastal counties. Edgecombe County lay in the fertile area of the coastal plain, representing the major cotton-producing communities of the region.

Following the trend of recent works on the nineteenth century, this project is a community-based study.[11] Especially true for the Civil War and Reconstruction era, many Americans hardly traveled outside of their county or small township. The day-to-day lives of local residents played out amongst longtime neighbors and close relatives, and many political loyalties emerged within that context. As national and state politics unfolded, local communities confronted their effects and consequences first. The destruction, tremendous loss of life, and poverty that followed the Civil War disrupted the harmony and communal ties of many localities. For most southerners, restoring their community became the chief object of the Reconstruction period. A regional analysis of North Carolina can also provide unique insights. The state functioned much the same as many Deep South states, relying on

[10] Judkin Browning, "26th North Carolina Comprehensive Database," in author's possession.

[11] For nineteenth century North Carolina community studies, see: Judkin, Browning, "'In Search of All That Was Near and Dear to Me:' Desertion as a Window into Community Divisions in Caldwell County during the Civil War," in *Southern Communities: Identity, Conflict, and Memory in the American South,* edited by Steven E. Nash and Bruce E. Stewart, 113-129, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2019); Martin Crawford, *Ashe County's Civil War: Community and Society in the Appalachian South,* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001); David H. McGee, "'Home and Friends:' Kinship, Community, and Elite Women in Caldwell County, North Carolina, during the Civil war," *North Carolina Historical Review* 74 (1997): 363-388; Kevin Oshnock, "The Isolation Factor: Differing Loyalties of Watauga and Buncombe Counties during the Civil War," *North Carolina Historical Review* 90 (2013): 385-413.

slave labor and plantation agriculture for economic gain. The South, however, was not a homogenous region. The geographic, social, and economic diversity of North Carolina, therefore, can shed light on how the Civil War and Reconstruction transpired in other southern states.

The importance of the local community can be seen most starkly in the mountains. Most mountain counties were rural and remote, often devoid of large cities or commercial centers. Mountain residents may have followed state and national trends and partaken in commercial trade, but their experience was particularly rooted in local concerns. Furthermore, North Carolina's mountains stood apart from many other communities in that slave labor and plantation agriculture did not serve as the principal mode of production. While they valued white supremacy and felt an impetus to defend the institution of slavery, racial fears and concerns did not play as important of a role in developing wartime loyalties as other factors. Consisting mainly of lower-class whites on small family-run farms, mountain residents sought first to protect their communities. They saw the onset of war as a disruption to their daily lives and an invasion of their homes. Much of the Unionism of that region developed out of class concerns, as many poor whites felt that the Confederacy served the interest of the elite. In the same way, many mountain residents desired to remain deferent to the slave-owning class, and felt the same southern nationalism that swept the region during that time. The local battles of the Civil War and Reconstruction, then, consisted mainly of whites against whites, Unionists against Secessionists.

In the Piedmont, the war and postwar period followed a course that was typical for much of the South. Most counties in the region practiced slave-based plantation agriculture and Confederate loyalties found a stronger foothold there. Like in the mountains, class and

cultural differences prevented any political unanimity, and a widespread anti-Confederate movement emerged. With a significantly higher population of African Americans, Piedmont residents had a particularly strong interest in the Civil War's outcome. As the war progressed and some counties saw the presence of Union troops, the plantation system received a fatal blow, as many slaves fled their masters and headed to Federal lines. The disruption of the plantation served a dual purpose in the Piedmont. For diehard Confederates, this disruption led them to cling to their secessionist stance even stronger. In contrast, many slave-owning Unionists saw secession as the death-knell of the South and slavery, and they pushed for a peace settlement as a means of protecting the institution. Piedmont residents living in or around Wake County, home of the state capital of Raleigh, saw firsthand the well-organized peace movement started by William Woods Holden. Thus, several counties in the region entertained Unionism in a more political form.

The coast of North Carolina had an exceptionally unique experience during these years. In many coastal counties, Reconstruction began as early as 1862 with the arrival of Union forces and their subsequent occupation period. This occurred in Beaufort, Carteret, and Craven counties. Although coastal residents experienced the same political and social divisions as many other regions, military occupation tested their loyalties in a way that did not happen elsewhere. With the introduction of military occupation, coastal residents received an early test of Reconstruction, experiencing the divisive policies of a radical new Union. Additionally, coastal economies functioned in a number of different ways. Fishing industries, naval stores, commercial trading, and plantation agriculture defined the region. Edgecombe County is distinctive in that they produced the most cotton in the state by a large majority, and the slave population outnumbered whites. That county remained, for the most

part, uniform in their support for the Confederacy, and watching the occupation experience of their neighbors entrenched them further in that cause.

For all of the regional variances in North Carolina, many of their experiences remained uniform. Throughout the state, the Civil War divided local communities and created brutal conflicts amongst neighbors and friends. When the war ended, each region sought to restore order and continued to fight for local control. Wartime loyalty served as the measure for one's successes or failures throughout Reconstruction, and much of the postwar discord found expression in wartime terms. During elections and social interactions, locals continued to use "Unionist" and "Confederate" as labels as the memory of the war remained fresh in their minds. Despite supporting the winning side of the war, Unionists in North Carolina remained a minority and lacked the political savvy, prestige, and economic advantages of the prewar elite. Grappling with wartime defeat, local Confederates sought to suppress these Unionists in the harshest way. To them, Unionists supported emancipation and the dreaded "Negro Rule" that led many to support secession from the beginning. As Unionists and freedpeople cooperated in the postwar years, attempting to reshape southern society in a more democratic way, former Confederates utilized violence, legal persecution, and social marginalization to regain local control.

Despite the widespread anti-Confederate movements that arose during the war, Unionism in North Carolina appeared more influential than it truly was. Writing in the fall of 1865, Illinois journalist Sidney Andrews wrote that "it probably never will be settled whether the State did or did not want to go out of the Union in May, 1861." His confusion stemmed from the fact that many North Carolinians proclaimed Unionism during and after the war, but they still rejected Reconstruction and the Federal government. Andrews concluded that North

Carolina Unionism was "mere personal bitterness toward Jeff Davis, or Governor Vance," and that in the state, "Unionism in name is one thing, and Unionism in fact quite another."[12] His analysis proved accurate, as Unionist sentiment seemed to disappear by the end of the war. Many true Unionists did remain in the state, but Conservatives and former Confederates subdued their vision for a more democratic South. By 1871, the systematic violence enacted by former Confederates won the day, and they redeemed the state from radical politics.

[12] Sidney Andrews, *The South Since the War: As Shown by Fourteen Weeks of Travel and Observations in Georgia and the Carolinas* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1866), 184-185.

I

"The spirit of rebellion is more defiant than ever:"
Unionists and Rebels in North Carolina's Mountains

"Follow me and we'll get through the lines," Jesse D. Hawkins shouted to his fellow soldier. In 1863 Hawkins, a volunteer soldier in the Confederate Army, broke from his ranks during a battle and dashed to the Union lines. Still in his Confederate uniform, the Union soldiers took him as a prisoner and brought him to Rock Island, Illinois where he enlisted in the 3rd U.S. Volunteer Infantry. When the war began, Hawkins had lived alone with his mother in the small township of Buffalo Creek in Caldwell County, North Carolina, with only $350 in real and personal property. He never intended to serve in the Confederate ranks, but the passage of the Conscription Act in April 1862 ensured he would. Upon hearing from his neighbors that conscripts fought on the front lines with no choice over the company in which they would serve, Hawkins instead volunteered in the Fifty-Eighth North Carolina Regiment, ultimately "with the intention of going through the lines and joining the Union army." William Coffey, a private in the Twenty-Sixth North Carolina Infantry and Hawkins' neighbor, threatened that if he ever returned home, he "would be shot down like a dog." Hawkins' reputation soon spread through his community and for his actions, neighborhood secessionists branded him as a Tory, stole his property, and threatened to tar and feather him and all others like him.[1]

Hawkins' story was not unusual for the many reluctant secessionists and pragmatic Unionists living in western North Carolina during the Civil War. Like most mountaineers,

[1] Deposition of Jesse D. Hawkins, Claim of Jesse D. Hawkins, Caldwell County, N.C., Barred and Disallowed Case Files of the Southern Claims Commission, 1871-1880, (hereafter cited as SCC); *1860 U.S. Census*, Caldwell Co., N.C., pop. Sch. (Washington D.C.: National Archives), accessed at https://ancestry.com.

Hawkins based his decisions on personal factors and acted in ways that he saw as being the most beneficial to him and his family. Despite his loyalty to either the Union or Confederacy being conditional and half-hearted at best, his more committed neighbors interpreted his service to the Union as an act of disloyalty and treated him accordingly. In the postwar period, threats of violence and persecution did not cease. In an attempt to ameliorate their defeat in war, mountain conservatives and former Confederates fought to maintain political supremacy within their community. Through threatened and actual violence, social marginalization, and legal persecution, former rebels kept their communities in the conservative fold. For many western North Carolinians like Jesse Hawkins, wartime actions and loyalties continued to divide local communities during the Reconstruction era.

As scholars have frequently noted, western North Carolina was far from united in their cause against the Union. From the earliest debates over secession, western North Carolinians displayed a reluctance to commit to either Union or secession. In their study of the Civil War in North Carolina's mountains, John Inscoe and Gordon McKinney found that for many, ideology rarely informed their loyalties, which were fluid, and influenced by "the communities of which they were a part, and the variables that rendered those communities such different entities." When the war first began, prompted by President Lincoln's call to put down the rebellion, many mountain residents enthusiastically joined the Confederate ranks. The Civil War and the Confederacy's war policies, however, placed unprecedented burdens on mountain society and threw these already tenuous loyalties into question. The war effort required food, money, materials, and manpower, all resources withdrawn from local families in small communities. In a relatively poor region of the state, the loss of men combined with the scarcity of money could displace or starve entire households.

Conscription, perhaps the most divisive Confederate war policy, drove an irreparable wedge between many citizens. Harsh tax policies and conscription led some to reject the Confederacy outright and even sparked a vast resistance movement throughout the state.[2]

Western North Carolinians opposed the Confederacy in a number of ways. Disloyal acts could take the form of avoiding conscription, feeding escaped prisoners of war, deserting the army or aiding others who deserted. These actions, however, rarely coincided with political loyalty and served as an expression of anti-Confederate or anti-war sentiment. More ideologically inclined mountaineers held peace meetings, displayed the American flag, or organized militant resistance against Confederate Home Guards and regular soldiers. Whatever the mode of resistance, disloyal conduct posed a serious threat to the war effort, requiring North Carolina's government authorities to divert much-needed military resources to the mountain region. This campaign against anti-Confederates launched a trend of brutal suppression of dissidents that carried into the postwar period as a means of maintaining Confederate hegemony. As historian Steven Nash has argued, when the fighting ended, "western North Carolina divided between Confederates, Unionists, and those somewhere in between during the Civil War" with wartime actions serving as the litmus test of one's loyalty.[3]

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[2] Steven E. Nash, *Reconstruction's Ragged Edge: The Politics of Postwar Life in the Southern Mountains* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 7; John C. Inscoe and Gordon B. McKinney, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia: Western North Carolina in the Civil War* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 8, 9-11, 282; William T. Auman, *Civil War in the North Carolina Quaker Belt: The Confederate Campaign Against Peace Agitators, Deserters and Draft Dodgers* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2014), 6-8.

[3] Nash, *Reconstructions's Ragged Edge,* 7.

By early 1861 with the election of Abraham Lincoln to the Presidency, secessionist fervor spread rapidly throughout the South. With South Carolina taking the lead in December 1860, several states including North Carolina discussed the prospect of disunion. In the western counties, however, the idea of separating from the North seemed too rash. Indeed, many mountaineers took the watch-and-wait approach in regard to national politics. A Democrat from Ashe County expressed the cool-headedness in his county when explaining to Raleigh newspapers, "I do not believe there is a single man in the County who is in favor of secession for existing causes…We say, try Lincoln. If he does well, all will be right. If he violates the Constitution, there will be time enough to withdraw from the Union."[4] In February, the citizens of Ashe County cast an 84 percent majority vote against calling for a secession convention (which narrowly failed statewide) and at a mass meeting in April, declared, "we are still devotedly attached to the Union of these States."[5]

Wilkes County's Quaker roots influenced their more moderate views toward secession. Inclined more toward pacifism, Wilkes residents believed that fire-eating southerners eager for fighting agitated the secession question and that they would surely manipulate a convention and thrust the state into war. This reluctance, however, did not mean that they did not consider secession. Wilkes County residents expressed a similar conditional Unionism to that in Ashe County in a public meeting led by the prominent merchant Calvin J. Cowles. The members of this meeting acknowledged their disdain for Lincoln and the Republicans but refused to go so far as seceding at such an early time. They encouraged

[4] "The Voice of the People," Raleigh *Weekly Standard,* January 2, 1861, 1.

[5] "Union Meeting in Ashe," Raleigh *Weekly Standard,* April 3, 1861, 2; Martin Crawford, *Ashe County's Civil War* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001), 70.

"exhausting all conciliatory means" before making any hasty decisions while granting that if they were still "unable to secure safety in the Union, we are as ready as any people to sacrifice our blood and treasure to maintain and preserve our institutions out of the Union."[6] Ultimately, Wilkes voted against a secession convention with a 97 percent majority, one of the highest in the state.[7]

In nearby Caldwell County, conversations about the prospects of disunion took a more combative character. During a public meeting in late December 1860, Caldwell residents drafted twelve resolutions condemning the Federal government, none of which displayed a reluctance about seceding. They called for a convention as a means of defining North Carolina's "position in this momentous crisis." This more aggressive stature may be explained by the fact that Caldwell's elite citizens, hailing from families like the Lenoirs, Pattersons, Joneses, and Harpers, chaired the meeting.[8] Though the mountains had only a small population of slaves, these families fell within the state's wealthiest slave-owning families, and were some of the most influential elites in western North Carolina.[9] The broader citizenry, however, did not share their secessionist sentiments and voted against a convention by a count of 465 votes to 372, reflecting deep-seated divisions within the county.[10]

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[6] Auman, *Civil War in the North Carolina Quaker Belt,* 29; "Public Meeting in Wilkes County," Raleigh *Semi-Weekly Standard,* January 5, 1861, 2.

[7] Auman, *Civil War in the North Carolina Quaker Belt,* 30.

[8] "Union Meeting in Caldwell County," Raleigh *Semi-Weekly Standard,* January 1, 1861, 2.

[9] Nash, *Reconstruction's Ragged Edge,* 10, 12.

[10] "Election Returns for Caldwell County," Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

After the attack on Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, and President Abraham Lincoln's subsequent proclamation calling for 75,000 troops to put down the rebellion, a wave of secessionist feeling overwhelmed the mountains. By the end of April, ninety-seven Caldwell men formed Company A of the Twenty-Second North Carolina. Just over a month later, two additional companies of men formed in Caldwell that would become a portion of the Twenty-Sixth North Carolina Infantry.[11] Similarly, Ashe County men caught up in the excitement volunteered in waves. By the war's end, the county formed six full companies while others crossed state lines to join other regiments. As one resident, James M. Gentry noted, "we watch and wait men are out now…we are for separation and against all sorts of compromise."[12] Despite casting nearly a unanimous vote against secession, Wilkes County men fell victim to the war fever. On April 30, a crowd of men met at Wilkesboro where "a great deal of excitement" occurred as people drank and rejoiced over the news. Not all displayed the same euphoria, however, as Wilkes only had a 15.3 percent enlistment rate, one of the lowest in the state. Local resident James Gwyn wrote to his brother in Caldwell County that for all of the celebration, "I think if an influential man had got up and espoused the other side, he would have had a good many to join him."[13]

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[11] Judkin Browning, "'In Search of All That Was Near and Dear to Me:' Desertion as a Window into Community Divisions in Caldwell County during the Civil War," in *Southern Communities: Identity, Conflict, and Memory in the American South* ed., Steven E. Nash and Bruce E. Stewart (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2019), 115.

[12] Martin Crawford, "Confederate Volunteering and Enlistment in Ashe County, North Carolina, 1861-1862," *Civil War History* 37 (March 1997): 32-33, 37; James M. Gentry to Jonathan Faw, May 6, 1861, quoted in Crawford, *Ashe County's Civil War,* 75.

[13] James Gwyn quoted in Browning, "In Search of All That Was Near and Dear to Me," 115; Auman, *Civil War in North Carolina's Quaker Belt,* 32.

These divisions appeared early throughout the mountains. In early May, James Gentry of Ashe County noted that although the public conducted several anti-secession meetings in the winter, "a man is in great danger to express northern prefferences [sic] here now."[14] In Wilkes County, the old Whigs and pacifist Quakers stood their ground against secession Democrats. Owing to the low enlistment rate, local secessionists formed a vigilance committee that harassed Unionists and coerced them into service. In May, the committee arrested Obadiah Sprinkle and Milton Speaks for speaking against secession and refusing to volunteer. Local merchant Calvin Cowles wrote, the secessionists "tied them to a tree & whipped them on their bear [sic] backs, shaved their heads," and put them in the Wilkesboro jail. Sprinkle continued to oppose the committee, leading them to fasten a noose around his neck, only to be stopped by local Whig friends of the condemned men. That same night, armed secessionists broke into the jail and carried both Speaks and Sprinkle off to one of North Carolina's coastal forts to serve in the Confederate army.[15]

For the reluctant secessionists living in North Carolina's mountains, the hardships of war further weakened their loyalties. From the outset, mountain residents lacked food, resources, and labor in the form of men, making it nearly impossible to farm, the primary occupation for most citizens. A Wilkes County businessman wrote to Calvin Cowles that "our difficulties with the north has frustrated & deranged all kinds of business," complaining that his brother's enlistment forced upon him "a double portion of home duties."[16] The loss

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[14] James M. Gentry to Jonathan Faw, May 6, 1861 quoted in Crawford, *Ashe County's Civil War,* 75.

[15] Calvin J. Cowles quoted in Auman, *Civil War in North Carolina's Quaker Belt,* 34.

[16] William Horton to Calvin J. Cowles, September 23, 1861, Calvin J. Cowles Papers, State Archives of North Carolina (hereafter cited as SANC).

of men could be particularly tough on those at home that could not work for themselves. When Caldwell County men John Harrison Gibson and Payton Gibson left home to fight, for example, they left their widowed mother alone. She pleaded with the state governor that she was "a poor widow woman dependent on my boys for surport [sic]." Despite sacrificing clothing and provisions to the war effort, the widowed Gibson explained, sacrificing her sons hurt her the most.[17]

These problems only worsened with the Confederacy's passage of a conscription law on April 16, 1862, one of the most unpopular war policies instituted by the Confederate government. The conscript law formed the basis of anti-Confederate movements throughout the region. When Confederate President Jefferson Davis recommended a conscription policy, William Woods Holden - editor of the Raleigh *Standard* and later leader of North Carolina's 1863 peace movement - called it "one of the most tremendous engines of military despotism."[18] Conscription was not only unpopular, but also unsustainable. Drafted in January of 1863, Goodwyn Harris deserted the Twenty-Sixth North Carolina to return to his wife and eight children. A tenant farmer, Harris wrote to Governor Vance for pardon, explaining that "I have a larg family of little children the oldest ones being girls, my wife but very weakly herself and dependent on my dayly labors for their subsistence."[19] As he clarified, Harris did not desert for malicious purposes or ideological reasons, but out of necessity to support his family. Governor Zebulon Vance understood Harris's predicament.

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[17] Elander Gibson to Vance, November 30, 1862, Zebulon B. Vance, Governors Papers, SANC.

[18] "Military Conscription," Raleigh *Semi-Weekly Standard,* April 12, 1862, 2.

[19] Goodwyn Harris to Zebulon Vance, July 13, 1863, quoted in Browning, "In Search of All That Was Near and Dear to Me," 123.

In May 1862, Vance wrote, "I do not believe one case [of desertion] in a hundred," was caused by disloyalty, but rather by family hardships.[20] By the spring of 1864, Vance sought the suspension of conscription, specifically in the mountains. He wrote to the Confederate War Department, "the Mountain counties of Western North Carolina…are filled with tories and deserters…[they] have lost their crops by being in the field, nearly all the time." If conscription continued to take men away from their homes, he continued, "their condition will be wretched, and hundreds will go to the enemy."[21]

Between Ashe, Caldwell, and Wilkes counties, 13 percent of conscripted and volunteer soldiers deserted.[22] Desertion not only hurt North Carolina's war effort but also drove a wedge between increasingly divided communities. In Lenoir, the seat of Caldwell County, where Confederate support was strong, Twenty-Sixth North Carolina soldier Harvey Lafevers deserted from his company to return to his wife Clementine Hood. Lafevers did not join the Confederacy during the initial wave of secession excitement, but later in 1862 under pressure from his neighbors. He returned after sixteen months of service without a furlough but his wife Clementine rejected his presence. Clementine denied Lafevers food, drink, or shelter, sending him back to his post. Clementine knew that her association with a deserter

[20] Zebulon B. Vance quoted in Browning, "In Search of All That Was Near and Dear to Me, 123.

[21] Zebulon B. Vance to J.A. Seddon, April 11, 1864 quoted in "Correspondence Between Gov. Vance and the Authorities at Richmond," Raleigh *Daily Conservative,* July 2, 1864, 1.

[22] Scott-King Owen, "Conditional Confederates: Absenteeism among Western North Carolina Soldiers, 1861-1865," *Civil War History* 57 (2011), 356.

would alienate her from her neighbors. Indeed, Caldwell's elites and respected ministers publicly shamed deserters regularly.[23]

The burdens of war and conscription set the stage for a large-scale resistance movement throughout the mountains in 1863. Robert M. Smith from Wilkes County spoke for many in saying "up to 1862 I was not an adherent to the Union cause, but after some time in 1862 I was."[24] Most of this resistance came from Unionist pockets within several mountain communities. As Kevin Oshnock has argued, geographic constraints could serve as a determinant of one's loyalty, with Unionists living in the more remote regions and secessionists residing mainly in and around commercialized towns.[25] Census data of Union veterans conducted in 1890 by the Federal government reveal these differences. Out of the seventy-four listed Union veterans in Ashe County, 52 percent resided in westernmost districts of North Fork and Laurel, bordering Unionist east Tennessee. Similarly, 55 percent of Caldwell County's twenty-nine Union veterans lived in the rural towns of Globe and John's River, far west of the county seat. In the strongly Unionist Wilkes County, one-third of their Union veterans lived in the Trap Hill region, a "Radical stronghold" that became a theater of militant resistance to the Confederacy.[26]

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[23] Browning, "In Search of All That Was Near and Dear to Me," 124-125.

[24] Deposition of Robert M. Smith, Claim of Abner S. Marley, Wilkes County, N.C., Barred and Disallowed Claims, SCC.

[25] Kevin Oshnock, "The Isolation Factor: Differing Loyalties of Watauga and Buncombe Counties during the Civil War," *North Carolina Historical Review* 90 (October 2013): 385-413.

[26] *1890 U.S. Census,* Wilkes, Co., N.C., "Special Schedules of the Eleventh Census Enumerating Union Veterans and Widows of Union Veterans of the Civil War," (Washington D.C., National Archives), accessed at https://www.ancestry.com; "The Gubernatorial Campaign, Raleigh *Daily News,* July 22, 1872, 3.

These Unionist hotspots erupted into a theater of full-blown resistance to the Confederacy, both peaceful and militant. The most common form of resistance came from men opposed to conscription, who formed themselves into armed bands. These groups engaged in skirmishes with local militias or Home Guards and locals derisively labeled them "bushwhackers." Although some of these bands formed out of selfish opportunistic reasons, their activity hampered the Confederate war effort, and many members joined these groups to actively oppose the war. From the start of the conflict, North Fork residents in Ashe County capitalized on their proximity to east Tennessee, stirring up much trouble in the region. In August 1861, pro-secessionist James Wagg wrote to Governor Henry Clark that "hundreds" of people on the Tennessee border aided the Union cause "by talking in their favor, joining their companies for the Northern army or in any other way encouraging the rebellious."[27] Indeed, Martin Crawford asserts that North Fork "anti-Confederate resistance was essentially an outreach of east Tennessee Unionism."[28]

On the western edges of Caldwell County, bands of bushwhackers and raiders roamed the area, led by one of the most notorious bushwhackers in western North Carolina, William "Keith" Blalock. Blalock received a discharge from the Twenty-Sixth North Carolina and moved near Grandfather Mountain where he recruited deserters, fugitives, or escaped prisoners into his ranks. Blalock led several raids throughout Caldwell County, generally terrorizing the community.[29] Despite the seemingly indiscriminate nature of Blalock's group

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[27] James Wagg to Henry T. Clark, August 31, 1861, Henry Toole Clark, Governors Papers, SANC.

[28] Crawford, *Ashe County's Civil War,* 127.

[29] W.W. Scott, *Annals of Caldwell County* (Lenoir: Caldwell County Genealogical Society, 1930), 243; Browning, "In Search of All That Was Near and Dear to Me," 126.

and their raids, his motives stemmed directly from Confederate abuse. Blalock's stepfather, Austin Coffey, supported the Union cause and spent much time aiding deserters from the rebel armies as well as guiding escaped Union prisoners of war to safety. For these actions, Confederate militiamen arrested the sixty-year-old, hog-tied him, and left him in the cold forests. After becoming "insensible" and "too weak to stand on his feet," the militia soldiers shot Coffey and threw his body onto a hog farm. Blalock "swore a blood-feud" against the Confederacy, crowning his vengeance by murdering Caldwell's sheriff for leading the militia in these actions.[30]

During the summer of 1863, Wilkes County Unionists organized eight public meetings advocating for a peace settlement and denouncing the policies of the Confederate government. During this peace movement, some of Wilkes County's most influential Unionists rose to prominence. Trap Hill native John Quincy Adams Bryan served as a Unionist guide in the mountains as well as "the most noted anti-Confederate leader in Wilkes County." In late August 1863, Bryan gathered upwards of 500 Unionists, deserters, and other anti-Confederates, and marched into the town of Wilkesboro. Local Confederate James Gwyn watched in horror as Bryan "sent out pickets upon all the roads leading to Town - & then raised the Union flag."[31]

With his large following, John Q.A. Bryan continued to organize militant groups of anti-Confederates. In early September, Raleigh newspapers reported, "there is an organized band of deserters and tories at or near Trap Hill…They are said to number about 600, have

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[30] Maj. Frank Wolcott to "General," July 18, 1866, Jonathan Worth, Governors Papers, SANC; Scott, *Annals of Caldwell County,* 243.

[31] James Gwyn quoted in Auman, *Civil War in the North Carolina Quaker Belt,* 106.

regularly elected officers and have all taken the oath to support the Lincoln government."[32] The very next day on September 8, Bryan led this group into Iredell County and engaged in a skirmish with a detachment of Raleigh Home Guard units sent to hunt down deserters.[33] Reports of peace movements and militant displays shocked the state's Confederate supporters and inspired other peace meetings in the mountains. Following Wilkes County's lead, neighboring Watauga County residents organized to discuss the prospect of peace. Ashe County Unionists sent their own representatives to voice their concerns, demonstrating the growing anti-Confederate sentiment in the northwestern county. There might have been Unionist meetings in Ashe County, but the consolidation of the minority group of Unionists along the western edges of the county meant that they needed to organize elsewhere.[34]

Anti-Confederate movements in the mountains, whether through irregular warfare or political organization, led North Carolina's government to embark on a campaign of brutal suppression by the summer of 1863. That August, Governor Zebulon Baird Vance wrote to the Confederate Secretary of War requesting some sort of regular force that could put down the insurrections popping up in the west. Vance complained that Home Guard units and local militias failed to put down resistance at every attempt, disrupting the lives of locals in their futile efforts. In response, General Robert E. Lee sent two regiments, the Twenty-First and Fifty-Sixth North Carolina, along with a cavalry unit under the command of General Robert

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[32] "Organized for Resistance," Raleigh *Daily Progress,* September 7, 1863, 2.

[33] Auman, *Civil War in North Carolina's Quaker Belt,* 106; "Trouble in Wilkes and Iredell," Greensboro *Patriot*, September 17, 1863, 3.

[34] "Public Meeting in Watauga County," Raleigh *Semi-Weekly Standard,* August 28, 1863, 2; Crawford, *Ashe County's Civil War,* 126.

F. Hoke. Over the next six weeks, Hoke and his men moved into Wilkes County, the primary point of resistance, in search of John Q.A. Bryan and his followers.[35]

In addition to Hoke's men, the Thirty-Fourth Virginia Cavalry under Lieutenant Colonel Vincent Witcher patrolled the borders of western North Carolina, Virginia, and eastern Tennessee in an attempt to flush out Union pilots and bands of deserters. Union pilots like John Q.A. Bryan and others, utilized the forests separating the states as a sort of underground railroad for bringing disaffected southerners across Union lines. In November 1863, Witcher and his men learned from loyal sources that Unionists utilized the area known as Limestone Cove in Unicoi County, Tennessee, as a hideout and checkpoint. Witcher advanced to the home of James and David Bell, well-known Unionists in the area, where unbeknownst to them, Bryan and fifty-seven anti-Confederates had been staying. Upon their arrival, Bryan and the others fled into the forests but not before the Confederate forces gunned down eleven of them. In ruthless fashion, the cavalrymen executed the wounded or anyone lagging in their escape. Bryan slipped away and eventually joined the ranks of the Federal Tenth Tennessee Cavalry, serving as a first lieutenant and later captain until the end of the war.[36]

In Wilkes County, Robert Hoke's men took to similarly harsh tactics. Locals living in Trap Hill and other neighborhoods known for their disaffection complained to newspapers

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[35] Inscoe and McKinney, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia,* 126-127.

[36] Daniel Ellis, *Thrilling Adventures of Daniel Ellis: The Great Union Guide of East Tennessee For a Period of Nearly Four Years During the Great Southern Rebellion* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1867), 328-336; John Q.A. Bryan, First Lieutenant, Captain, Co. H, 10th Tennessee Cavalry, "Compiled Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Tennessee, National Archives: Washington D.C., accessed by https://www.fold3.com (hereafter Compiled Service Records).

and Governor Vance of their abuses. One complaint charged that the soldiers "instead of arresting deserters in a proper way, are plundering houses, taking grain, stock and provisions from women and children, getting drunk, fiddling, dancing, &c."[37] Even General Hoke acknowledged the misconduct of his men in a letter saying, "it was my custom to temporarily impress the property of deserters in order to cause them to surrender…But this has lately been greatly abused, converted into almost theft. I am exceedingly anxious to ascertain the names of the officers and men who have been acting in this manner."[38] There is no evidence to suggest that Hoke punished any of his men.

Ultimately, Hoke arrested up to 500 men suspected of desertion, theft, or other crimes against the Confederacy.[39] In one instance, Hoke's men engaged in a small skirmish with some Confederate deserters, including Harrison Church. Church had enlisted in the Twenty-Sixth North Carolina in June 1861, later transferring to the Fifty-Third. Eventually, Church deserted the army and took up arms against the Confederacy with others like Bryan. During the skirmish, Confederate forces wounded him severely. Despite being found in a Federal uniform with an officer's commission, they treated Church as a traitor, sending him to the Richmond prison, Castle Thunder.[40] Hoke's men also arrested the prominent businessman Calvin J. Cowles. His brother, a Confederate militia officer, advised Cowles to express his

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[37] "Outrages by the Military," Raleigh *Weekly Standard,* December 23, 1863, 3.

[38] Genl Robt. F. Hoke to Dr. R. F. Hackett, December 8, 1863, quoted in Thomas Felix Hickerson, *Echoes of Happy Valley: Letters and Diaries, Family Life in the South, Civil War History* (Durham, NC: Seeman Printery Inc., 1962), 97-98.

[39] Auman, *Civil War in North Carolina's Quaker Belt,* 110-113.

[40] "Grave Charge - The Richmond *Dispatch* says," Raleigh *Daily Progress*, December 19, 1864, 2; Auman, *Civil War in North Carolina's Quaker Belt,* 183.

Unionist views more moderately because Hoke's men "are determined to go to Trap Hill & arrest every rebel to the southern cause…they will be hung like dogs."[41] Two weeks after his brother's letter, Confederates arrested Cowles and sent him to Richmond. The arrest prompted Cowles to write Governor Vance a heated letter saying that he "was arrested at the instance of old political enemies to gratify old political animosities." Cowles claimed that local Confederates persecuted Unionists and old Whigs that opposed secession. [42]

In Ashe County, local police and militia used their own methods of suppression to enforce Confederate solidarity. During the late months of 1862 and early in 1863, a man named Jesse Price conducted several bushwhacking raids into the county, retreating into the hills of East Tennessee each time. Ashe County's militia set up a perimeter along the state border, while another company in Grayson County, Virginia, moved south, hoping to cut off Price and his gang. The Virginia company captured Price and four of his family members, sons Hiram, James, and Moses, and nephew Solomon. Local Home Guard officer John Hartzog, along with ten to twelve men of the Thirty-Seventh North Carolina, brought Price and his relatives into Jefferson where, "without judge or jury, or benefit of clergy," they hanged him, Hiram, Solomon, and James. The militia spared Moses because of his young age. Moses went on to join the Twenty-First West Virginia Cavalry in the Union army.[43]

The Confederate campaign against dissent created a sense of unity amongst those that adamantly supported the rebellion. Outside of military authority, mountain civilians worked

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[41] Josiah Cowles quoted in Auman, *Civil War in North Carolina's Quaker Belt*, 111.

[42] Calvin Cowles quoted in, Auman, *Quaker Belt*., 112.

[43] "Bushwhackers Hung," Fayetteville *Weekly Observer,* April 27, 1863, 4; Crawford, *Ashe County,* 111-112.

diligently to suppress those acting in ways deemed disloyal. In Caldwell County, local resident John Hawkins recalled that Confederate supporters "threatened men suspected of Unionism with conscription, imprisonment, and public indignation so that a Union man was not allowed, without danger, to publicly express his Union sentiments."[44] Overt action against the war effort guaranteed some form of communal backlash. James Downs of Deals Mills, Caldwell County, helped his illiterate neighbors write letters to their relatives in the military urging them to desert. As a consequence of his complicity in encouraging this treason, Downs's neighbors subjected him to personal insults, public humiliation, and threats of property destruction.[45] Speaking in favor of the Union or using one's influence to hinder the rebellion brought the same hostility. To avoid military service, Calvin S. King worked as a miner in Caldwell during the war. King hired men eligible for conscription to help keep them out of the war while inducing others to avoid military service for the Confederacy. A local "investigation committee" detained King and threatened to shave his head and send him to Richmond.[46]

Local Confederates responded to dissent most severely in Wilkes County, where Unionists were especially active. In October 1863, 119 local Confederate sympathizers volunteered themselves to hunt down deserters and punish dissenters.[47] Mulberry farmer

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[44] Deposition of John L. Hawkins, Claim of James Cottrell, Caldwell County, N.C., Barred and Disallowed Claims, SCC.

[45] Witness Testimony of Larkin Pennell and John Winkler and Deposition of James Downs, Claim of James Downs, Caldwell County, N.C., Barred and Disallowed Claims, SCC.

[46] Deposition of Calvin S. King, Claim of Calvin S. King, Caldwell County, N.C., Barred and Disallowed Claims, SCC.

[47] "Wilkes County," Raleigh *Daily Progress,* October 16, 1863, 2.

Elijah Jennings watched helplessly as Confederate officers forced his two sons into service. Jennings advised his sons to obtain a furlough and then abscond to the Union lines. They followed his advice, joining the Union 2nd North Carolina Mounted Infantry where one of his sons died. In 1864, rebels under General Robert Hoke sought out Jennings after his rebel neighbors snitched on him. Jennings recalled that Hoke's men held him hostage in his home, while the soldiers "forced corn & provender from me against my will and payed [sic] me nothing thereafter."[48]

Just southeast from Elijah Jennings at Lewis Fork, Wilson Fairchild suffered similar persecution. Few in his neighborhood had "a better reputation as to loyalty." Fairchild's home served as a safe-haven for passing Union soldiers and anyone seeking refuge in the Union lines. A short time before the war's end, local rebels threatened to destroy Fairchild's family, then proceeded to shoot what few sheep he had. They also stole his food and bee stands. Fairchild recalled, "the officer pretended to pay me, that is, he let me have some Confederate money, but I did not call it pay."[49]

In late March 1865, the rifts in western North Carolina's society only widened as they experienced the harsh hand of war directly. Inspired by General William Sherman's total war campaign in Atlanta, General Ulysses Grant appointed General George Stoneman as commander of the District of East Tennessee with the task of conducting similar campaigns in the South where Sherman had not passed through. Stoneman ordered his men to destroy

[48] Deposition of Elijah Jennings, Claim of Elijah Jennings, Wilkes County, N.C., Approved Claims, SCC.

[49] Deposition of Wilson Fairchild, Claim of Wilson Fairchild, Wilkes County, N.C., Approved Claims, SCC.

and confiscate property, but not to engage in any abuse of civilians. On March 28, 1865, Stoneman and his men crossed into North Carolina where they systematically plundered the state's mountain communities.[50] After just a few days, Stoneman's men entered Caldwell County, then they proceeded to Wilkes. Newspapers reported that a force of "three to four thousand" destroyed the Patterson Factory and "plundered the citizens of everything they wished," throwing the counties "into intense excitement." In Wilkes County, Stoneman "gutted" Calvin J. Cowles's store despite his known reputation as an anti-Confederate.[51]

In their landmark study of the Civil War in western North Carolina, John Inscoe and Gordon McKinney surmised that aside from burning the Patterson Factory and plundering Cowles's store, the raiders acted relatively tamely in Caldwell and Wilkes Counties. They reached this conclusion upon reading letters from the Lenoirs, Pattersons, and Gwyns—noted elites of great wealth—that expressed admiration at the professional conduct of Stoneman's men. According to these elites, Stoneman treated them cordially and with respect, leading scholars to believe the raid did minimal damage.[52]

An analysis of other sources, however, leads to a different interpretation. In the 1870s, the Federal government created the Southern Claims Commission. This commission gave southerners the opportunity to file for reimbursement in the event that Union soldiers destroyed or confiscated their property, on the condition that they proved their wartime loyalty. For western North Carolinians, Stoneman's raid marked the only time that a Union

[50] Inscoe and McKinney, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia,* 243-244.

[51] "Stoneman's Raid," Raleigh *Daily Conservative,* April 8, 1865, 2.

[52] Inscoe and McKinney, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia,* 246-247.

force entered their localities. In Wilkes County, thirty-eight residents reported the loss of their property, mainly livestock. Similarly, twenty-one Caldwell County residents filed a claim.[53] Because the Southern Claims Commission operated over ten or more years after the war, it is likely that these numbers do not represent the full extent of the damage. Contemporary letters also show that kind treatment was reserved mainly for the wealthier classes of people. J.C. Norwood, a resident from Lenoir, wrote to Walter W. Lenoir that "the people down the valley [where poorer farmers resided] lost most of their horses, cattle, and food…we are in danger constantly."[54] Similarly, James Gwyn reported from Caldwell County that "the Union folks in the county fared worse than the Cecesh [secessionists]; they have had enough of Yankees."[55] Stoneman's raid had far-reaching consequences for western North Carolinians and alienated many mountain Unionists.

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Although Confederate forces formally surrendered in April 1865, fighting continued in North Carolina's mountains. Bushwhacking gangs, militant Unionists, and other disaffected southerners continued to pillage and settle old scores during the first days of Reconstruction. In southwestern Wilkes County, a group of disgruntled deserters and vagrants took shelter and constructed "Fort Hamby." The group made raids into Caldwell, Watauga, and Alexander counties. The "Fort Hamby gang," as they were known, operated for months after the end of the war. Several militia units conducted failed attacks on Fort

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[53] Totals come from both, *Approved Southern Claims Commission Files,* and *Barred and Disallowed Files of the Southern Claims Commission,* Wilkes and Caldwell co., North Carolina, https://www.fold3.com.

[54] J.C. Norwood quoted in Hickerson, *Echoes of Happy Valley,* 104.

[55] James Gwyn, quoted in Hickerson, *Echoes of Happy Valley,* 104.

Hamby, including joint-efforts alongside Caldwell and Watauga county Home Guards. Several militia officers died in their efforts. On May 14, 1865, twenty-two former Confederate soldiers pursued the bushwhackers into the Brushy Mountains in southwestern Wilkes County. After a brief firefight, the Confederate soldiers set fire to Fort Hamby, effectively ending the reign of terror.[56]

Violence also continued in Ashe County, forcing some residents to leave the county. Upon returning to his home in Jefferson, former Confederate soldier Nathaniel Price learned quickly that peace had not arrived in his neighborhood, as disaffected citizens sought vengeance for wartime acts. Price and others like him realized "they would have no peace or safety from the relatives and connections" they formerly knew. Price packed his belongings and headed to the remote Jackson County, never to return to his boyhood town. Price identified these violent parties with "the men [the Confederacy] punished," revealing the close association between bushwhacking and Unionism.[57] Contemporary newspapers and county histories often conflated violence and other criminal activity with Unionist sentiment, much like Nathaniel Price did. This failure to distinguish between anti-Confederate, Unionist, and criminal activity formed the basis of postwar politics in the mountains. In their quest to regain power, former Confederates sought to punish those that did not wholeheartedly support their cause during the war.

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[56] Johnson J. Hayes, *The Land of Wilkes* (Wilkesboro, N.C.: Wilkes County Historical Society, 1962), 174-175.

[57] Ruth W. Shepherd, ed., *The Heritage of Ashe* County, North Carolina, Vol. 2 (Winston-Salem, N.C., 1984), 18-19.

The continuation of violence led several Ashe County residents to petition North Carolina's provisional governor, William Woods Holden, for protection in June 1865. Holden sent orders to Union forces located in Salisbury to send an officer to Ashe County, charged with the responsibility of organizing and appointing "a suitable police."[58] A few days later, a New York captain, J.H. Wells, traveled to Jefferson and began forming small police units. Wells appointed both Union and Confederate veterans to lead the company, with former Confederate Jonathan Osborn placed in charge. After assigning each company to specific voting precincts, Wells administered the oath of allegiance to each member.[59] For the moment, optimism prevailed in Ashe County as Unionists rejoiced "with the hopes of peace, and thankful that the time has come when they can express their opinions without fear" of violent backlash.[60]

Unionists in Caldwell County expressed a similar optimism after the military put down lingering violence. In a public meeting, Caldwell residents expressed excitement about the end of the war, calling it "the greatest evil" that ever afflicted them. These Unionists communicated a desire to quickly restore the country and to aid in suppressing those "who advise or aid in prolonging…a war against the government." With this newfound confidence, Caldwell Unionists proclaimed that "a large majority of the people of North Carolina have

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[58] Holden to Brig. Gen. Schofield, June 26, 1865, William Woods Holden, Governors Papers, SANC.

[59] John Preston Arthur, *Western North Carolina: A History, 1730-1913* (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton Printing Company, 1914), 625-626.

[60] "Written for the Daily Union Banner: News from Ashe and Alleghany Counties, The Good Work Progressing," Salisbury *Daily Union Banner,* June 16, 1865, 3.

ever maintained" Unionist feelings, "could they have freely spoken their sentiments."[61] Eager to enjoy the fruits of peacetime and a Union victory, these loyal mountaineers overlooked the volatility of those around them and the animosities born out of the war.

The optimism expressed in July 1865 quickly dissipated as unrest continued. In mid-August, Ashe County sheriff R.T. Hardin wrote Governor Holden that "there is a good deal of excitement in Tennessee…there has been a good deal of property taking from persons and there is some that will not return or even give the owners their property as we have no courts." According to Hardin, some people elected to "abscond and leave" with stolen property, causing much fighting among those mainly on the "West Borders of the County."[62] Ultimately, those bordering east Tennessee, where anti-Confederate sentiment reigned supreme, continued settling wartime scores and conducting revenge campaigns against their neighbors. Continued violence and Governor Holden's seeming inability to end it created a shift in allegiance for western North Carolina. As historian Steven Nash aptly noted, "the moderate men, previously willing to abide by Northern terms and oppose the restoration of the wartime leadership, drifted toward the Conservatives."[63]

At the end of 1865, North Carolina's first postwar gubernatorial election pitted provisional governor Holden against his former Secretary of Treasury, Jonathan Worth. Worth's anti-Reconstruction brand of Unionism served him well enough to win the race as he

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[61] "Public Meeting in Caldwell County," Raleigh *Daily Standard,* June 10, 1865, 2.

[62] R.T. Hardin to Holden, August 17, 1865, William Woods Holden, Governors Papers, SANC.

[63] Steven E. Nash, "'The Other War Was but the Beginning:' The Politics of loyalty in Western North Carolina, 1865-1867," in *Reconstructing Appalachia: The Civil War's Aftermath,* ed. Andrew W. Slap (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 118-119.

brought in former Confederates and conservative Unionists to his fold. Western North Carolinians, however, cast their votes for Holden because of his more aggressive attitude toward former Confederates. Ashe County residents gave Holden a 62 percent majority, while Wilkes County cast a 76 percent majority. Caldwell County's margins were tighter, giving only a 51 percent majority. Ultimately, the mountains could not carry the state, as Worth won 31,616 votes to Holden's 25,704.[64] Worth's election caused much anxiety in the mountains, where Unionists recognized him as the "secessionist candidate."

Worth's suspect loyalties were frightening to Unionists in the mountains, as they feared the prewar elite would return to power. Indeed, mountain resident R.L. Patterson wrote to the Governor's office in June 1865 that in Wilkes, Caldwell and Ashe, "my information leads me to believe that many original secessionists & later day fireeaters are working themselves into meetings & are preparing to climb into the first offices that present themselves."[65] When news reached the mountains that Worth won the election, one local Unionist from Ashe County wrote worriedly to Holden that "there are many rumors being circulated here which are exciting the minds of the people very much. One of which is that the people…have elected Mr. Worth and have consequently satisfied the Federal Government that our people are disloyal and cannot be admitted to the Union." More

[64] Nash, "The Other War Was but the Beginning," 118.

[65] R.L. Patterson to Gov. W.W. Holden quoted in, Horace W. Raper and Thornton W. Mitchell, eds., *The Papers of William Woods Holden: Volume 1, 1841-1868* (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 2000), 181-182.

frightening, however, was the thought that Worth's election would bring "a strong Military government and extensive…confiscation" of property.[66]

In some respects, this fear came true. At the national level, Radicals in Congress refused to recognize Worth or the government North Carolina had established. Thus, mountain Unionists had good reason to fear, as Worth pledged himself to restoring North Carolina's antebellum status quo. He sought to keep the prewar elite in power and prevent any substantial gains for the state's Republicans or progressive Unionists.[67] More significantly, however, Worth opposed almost all Reconstruction measures whether at the state, local, or national level. By the time he took office, mountain Unionists bombarded him and local newspapers with letters begging for relief from persecution from Worth's Conservative party voters, but their pleas fell on deaf ears.

In June 1866, Ashe County Unionists declared, "the rebels are in full power here. The spirit of rebellion is more defiant than ever…it is not safe for a Union man to acknowledge his principles." Empowered by Worth's election, conservatives began conducting "secret meetings" and organizing at an alarming pace, while others, according to one resident, "boast of their deeds in slaying Union men." The writer called for stripping former Confederates of the franchise, protecting ballot boxes, and punishing them for wartime crimes.[68] Indeed, local conservatives began weaponizing the court system as a means of ostracizing Unionists. In

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[66] William Baker to Holden, November 29, 1865, William Woods Holden, Governors Papers, SANC.

[67] Mark Bradley, *Bluecoats & Tar Heels: Soldiers and Civilians in Reconstruction North Carolina* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 95-97.

[68] "Interesting Extracts from Letters: A friend writing us from Ashe County says," Raleigh *Daily Standard*, June 23, 1866, 2.

August, Henry Farmer and forty-four Ashe County citizens petitioned Worth for legal protection. According to Farmer, local conservatives took them to court on charges of theft, trespass, and assault, all actions taken during the war.[69] Despite the conflict having ended a year prior, former Confederates and local conservatives continued to enforce their agenda through persecution and mob rule as an attempt to weed out dissenters.

Conservatives acted similarly in Wilkes and Caldwell County, bringing former Union soldiers to trial for actions taken while in uniform. In the summer of 1866, several Union veterans wrote Governor Worth to express their concerns, including Major General Francis C. Wolcott, who was conducting several investigations into the political climate of the western counties. E.A. Davis of Lewis Fork, Wilkes County, wrote one of the earliest letters to Worth, asking for protection from civil prosecution. Throughout the war, Davis opposed the Confederacy and garnered a reputation as a Unionist. He explained, "as my sentiments were well known, I was subjected to repeated insults, my life frequently threatened, and on several occasions at a later period jepordised [sic]" by his rebel neighbors. The harassment levied upon Davis proved too great, forcing him to flee his home in 1863 to join the Thirteenth Tennessee Cavalry. Davis operated within and around Wilkes County, clashing with Home Guard units and eventually joining Stoneman's raid in May 1865. Despite being in uniform and officially a member of the U.S. Army, local Confederates called him a Tory and a bushwhacker, attributing criminality to his actions. After the war, Calvin Land, a Home Guard officer, brought Davis to court on charges of robbery and assault. Davis being "the only U.S. officer who has been prosecuted" explained that "such prosecutions are instituted

[69] Jon C. Robinson to Gov. Worth, August 22, 1866, Jonathan Worth, Governors Papers, SANC.

purely through malice because during the existence of the Rebellion I was instrumental in carrying hundreds of Union men through the lines."[70]

Prosecutions like the one against Davis alarmed General Wolcott, leading him to the conclusion that "a majority of the magistrates in the mountain Counties are disloyal." Wolcott determined this after hearing the case of Wesley Williams of Wilkes County. Williams, like E.A. Davis, fled his home to join the Union Army. During his service, Williams engaged in several skirmishes and firefights with local Confederate militias and Home Guard Units. In one such skirmish, Williams shot and killed a Home Guard soldier named McNeil. Although McNeil was a casualty of war, local conservatives charged Wesley Williams with murder, where he faced the prospect of execution. Wolcott informed Worth of the trial, explaining that conservatives were efficiently stacking juries so that "disloyal men cannot be prosecuted with any chance for justice."[71]

In Caldwell County, conservatives acted even more aggressively in court prosecutions than in Wilkes. During the war, Unionists "were powerless to protect their persons or property" and so they left the county to join the Federal forces or to hide out. While absent, "their property was taken or destroyed by their rebel neighbors." When returning home, they found a destitute situation but according to General Wolcott "have made no effort to obtain redress from the parties who have reduced them to absolute beggary." Unionists knew local authorities would not address their claims, and their failure to even attempt to do so speaks to their low spirits after the war. During Caldwell County's

[70] E.A. Davis to General Thomas Ruger, July 18, 1866, Jonathan Worth, Governors Papers, SANC.

[71] Maj. Gen. Francis Wolcott to Worth, August 16, 1866, Jonathan Worth, Letter Book, SANC.

summer session of the Superior Court, the grand jury decided to prosecute 180 cases, 145 of them against Union veterans. William “Keith” Blalock, who “bears the scars of honorable service,” faced five different charges of trespass, one charge for murder, and several other petty charges. Local conservatives especially hated Blalock for his family’s anti-Confederate sentiments as well as his own record of bushwhacking and Union service. Like other Union veterans, conservatives and former rebels saw Blalock as nothing more than a "notorious villain" and a common criminal.[72]

Month after month, Wolcott and other army officers reported cases to Jonathan Worth, citing the names of those like Wilkes County's Joseph Hays, A.J. Blackburn, and George H. Brown, or Caldwell's David Moore and J.E. Lindsay. Local rebels pushed all of these men from their homes during the war or harassed them daily and continued to punish them after. Even David Moore, an elderly man, had property stolen and destroyed for his sentiments, leaving him in despair:

> All the loyal men who were appointed magistrates have been penned and the rebels in the country substituted. How can a Union man escpect [sic] justice from them? I appeal to the military authorities for protection and say that it is not right that now that the cause which I supported and suffered for is successful that I should (with all the other Union men in this county) be given over to the tender mercies of the defeated rebels.[73]

With their neighbors, local government, and court system organized against them, mountain Unionists realized that they must organize themselves for their own protection.

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[72] Maj. Gen. Francis Wolcott to Worth, July 18, 1866, Jonathan Worth, Governors Papers, SANC; “Western North Carolina – A correspondent writes from Caldwell County to the Raleigh Progress as follows,” Charlotte *Democrat,* May 29, 1866, 2.

[73] Francis Wolcott to Worth, July 18, 1866, Jonathan Worth, Governors Papers, SANC.

In August 1866, Major General Wolcott reported to Worth that more trouble could be on the rise in the mountains due to the formation of political societies and militias. As a continuation of the wartime Heroes of America, mountain Unionists in Wilkes and Ashe County joined the ranks of the pro-Union "Red-Strings" society. Made up of poorer citizens, Red Strings operated for "the protection of Union men from prosecution and the election of Union men to office." Wolcott noted that the organization remained peaceful and had no military features, but because of the secret passwords, oaths, and restricted membership, "those who are excluded oppose it bitterly," creating a further divide within the community. In the nearby counties of Surry and Alleghany, conservatives responded by forming militia companies entirely made up of former Confederate soldiers. It was Wolcott's opinion that "political excitement in the mountain Counties was very high," and "the organization of these political militia companies…will very soon lead to open violence."[74]

Always resistant to Federal authorities, Governor Worth did not believe the reports that he received. Instead, in June 1866, Worth appointed an agent of his personal choice, William S. Mason, to investigate "the facts touching the troubles and outrages alleged to exist" in the mountains.[75] Two months later, Mason echoed Wolcott's original reports, acknowledging that the Red Strings were "of no little power and influence," but in no way a threat to the peace. Militia companies formed in Surry and Alleghany did cause some unrest because of their Confederate-only membership, but in Ashe County, "no complaints have been heard in respect to that, it being composed of all classes indifferently." The most

[74] Francis Wolcott to Worth, August 16, 1866, Jonathan Worth, Letter Book, SANC.

[75] William C Bagley to William S. Mason, July 26, 1866, Jonathan Worth, Governors Papers, SANC.

troubling finding Mason reported was that conservatives continued to levy an "extraordinary number of indictments for criminal offences" for wartime acts. To Mason, these prosecutions served "to keep alive violent neighborhood hostilities," worsened "by a feeling on the part of those who may have been in the rebel armies." Ultimately, Mason concluded that conservatives failed to distinguish those that acted with "depraved motives," like common criminal bushwhackers, and those that "acted without personal motives," like Union veterans, so that justice could not be served to anyone.[76]

In the face of facts, Worth acted in defiance. Just five days after receiving Mason's findings, Worth wrote to John C. Robinson, the Freedmen's Bureau overseer of North Carolina, and expressed his confidence in the character of Wilkes County's magistrates. Worth based his opinion on the popular perceptions of Wilkes during the Civil War. He confused the anti-Confederate sentiment in the county as unconditional Unionism and radical Republicanism stating "it is a well-known fact that the County of Wilkes was conspicuous for its Union proclivities throughout the war," therefore believing the various petitions were "a misrepresentation of public sentiment in Wilkes." Worth even distorted the reports of his choice investigator, William Mason, explaining that his "information is that bona fide Union soldiers are everywhere treated with respect and that they cooperate heartily with other orderly citizens."[77] Wesley Williams, whose life was on trial for his actions as a Union soldier, would beg to differ.

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[76] William S. Mason to Worth, August 17, 1866.

[77] Jonathan Worth to John C. Robinson, August 22, 1866, Jonathan Worth, Letter Book, SANC.

In December 1866, Governor Worth addressed North Carolina's General Assembly in which he advocated for the apprenticeship of free blacks and declared that prejudice and discrimination in the courts had ceased in the state. While making his case, Worth dismissed the many "petitions addressed to the President and otherwise" that "charged upon our courts partiality and favoritism to the prejudice of the United States soldiers and negroes." He referenced Wilkes County and Mason's investigation into accounts about former rebels "imputing grossly disloyal conduct" to Unionists:

> I deemed it necessary to send an agent, in conjunction with one appointed by the military commandant, to inquire into the truthfulness of these allegations. I appointed William S. Mason, Esquire, of this city. His report, as well as that of the officer sent with him by General Robinson, showed the groundlessness of the complaint.[78]

Worth boldly lied. In actuality, Robinson consistently pressured Worth's administration to take action and confirmed the many reports of persecution. In one scathing letter, Robinson remarked that he was "sorry that requests for information are met by arguments…and sorry that I am to look to your Excellency for no assistance in protecting former Union men."[79]

Worth's refusal to assist Unionists in the mountains emboldened local conservatives. The formation of Red String organizations and the bitter fight at the national level between a Radical Republican-controlled Congress and President Andrew Johnson compelled local ex-Confederates to tighten their grip. In October 1866 Raleigh's *Weekly Standard* summed up the political situation when reporting, "it is not safe for Union men" in western North Carolina. "We sincerely believe," the article continued, "that if the State were now in the Union under present auspices…every unconditional Union man would be either driven from

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[78] "Message of Gov. Jonathan Worth," Hillsborough *Recorder,* December 5, 1866, 1.

[79] John C. Robinson to Worth, August 31, 1866, Jonathan Worth, Governors Papers, SANC.

the State, or compelled, from fear for himself or his family, to be silent in relation to public affairs."[80] The article cited an incident in Jefferson in which armed conservatives put down a Unionist demonstration. In an attempt to demonstrate their strength, a small group of Unionists organized and marched into Jefferson to fly the American flag over the town streets. Almost as soon as they hoisted the flag, Josh Baker, the elected county sheriff, confronted the men while a larger group of armed conservatives accompanied him. They tore down the flag, trampled it, and drove the "terrorists" away.[81] Sheriff Baker's presence represented an arm of local governmental authority, thereby effectively giving a legal endorsement to persecute Unionists and seemingly outlawed displaying the United States flag.

Despite their efforts in Ashe County, Unionists remained a small minority, unable to gain any political traction. By April 1867, former Confederates made significant gains in local politics. Ex-Confederates maintained their grip over local courts and managed to also send conservative delegates to the state legislature. Conservatives now essentially dominated local politics and, even more significantly, exerted the wishes of Ashe County Confederates at the state level. Ashe County Unionists, "even since the surrender," had been continually "proscribed, insulted, and abused" while being labeled "as Tories, Traitors, Bushwhackers, and the disturbers of the public peace by that party which brought the war." Just two years after Appomattox conservatives redeemed their county; as one Unionist solemnly declared,

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[80] "W.W. Holden's Complicity with Thad Stevens," Raleigh *Weekly Standard,* October 10, 1866, 1.

[81] Mrs. C.D. Neal, *Miss Chessie's Memories: Interesting People, Places, and Stories in Ashe County History Recounted* (Ronda, North Carolina: n.p., 1982), 2.

"the Rebs now have all the offices in the County."[82] Ashe County's quick process of redemption occurred seemingly uninhibited by either national or state-level politics. Writing from Morganton in 1868, Union Major William B. Royall explained that the quick rise of former Confederates occurred in spite of the large number of Unionists in the region. He observed, "the rebel portion of the population…are much more intelligent and powerful as a class" than Unionists.[83] As one Chestnut Hill resident put it, Republicans or Unionists could never win in the county because it "wasn't the Negroes that were segregated in the mountains – it was the Republicans."[84]

In Wilkes County, wartime leaders of anti-Confederate resistance continued to organize and express their political wishes. Calvin J. Cowles, for example, organized a public meeting in April 1867 accompanied by Union officer Colonel John Thomas Deweese, sent to Wilkes by Colonel George Bomford to aid persecuted Unionists. The crowd there "was so large that the Courthouse would not hold them, and the meeting was held on the green in front of the building."[85] Unionists felt relieved by Deweese's presence, but local conservatives were outraged. According to them, Deweese was "perverting his duties" by making "Radical speeches." The conservative newspaper *Sentinel* apparently believed that "Gen. Sickles had dispatched a sufficient military force to prevent outrages by 'Red-

[82] "Ashe County: A friend writing us from Ashe County says," Raleigh *Weekly Standard,* April 24, 1867, 1; "Republican Meeting in Ashe County," Raleigh *Daily Standard,* June 6, 1867, 2.

[83] Maj. William B. Royall, quoted in Bradley, *Bluecoats and Tar Heels,* 148.

[84] Unknown author, quoted in Crawford, *Ashe County's Civil War,* 168.

[85] "Republican Meeting in Wilkes," Raleigh *Weekly Standard,* April 10, 1867, 3.

Strings,'" and not the other way around.[86] This glaring misperception of events no doubt stemmed from Governor Worth's constant misinformation and spelled disaster for the future.

The climax of political fighting came to Wilkes during an 1867 Fourth of July celebration at Wilkesboro's courthouse held by local Republicans and Unionists. Already angry at Unionists' overt resistance to the old order, Wilkes County conservatives could not stand for such a celebration. Adding insult to injury, John Quincy Adams Bryan chaired the celebration, inviting African American minister Alfred Stokes as well as Harrison Church, the deserter from the rebel Fifty-Third North Carolina and Union Army veteran, to make speeches. When Stokes took the stage to speak, tempers boiled over. A former Confederate soldier and prominent lawyer, Col. Robert F. Armfield, interrupted the procession brandishing a pistol. Armfield's reputation preceded him as he was known for making derogatory speeches against the Union League and Heroes of America. When he demanded to speak, a prominent Unionist reverend, Samuel Smith, exclaimed that a Confederate had no place at their gathering as a crowd quickly formed near the door. Armfield did not arrive alone, however, and his rebel companions also drew their pistols.[87]

Aided by their larger numbers, the Unionists forced the rebels out of the courthouse onto the front steps where they said that Armfield could speak. The speech never took place though, as hostilities erupted inside the courthouse and spilled out into the front lawn into a full-blown riot. John Pedan, a former rebel, began the fighting by charging one Wesley Ball with a rock. Pedan's brother Joe quickly joined the conflict, smashing a rock over Ball's

[86] "North Carolina News," Wilmington *Daily Dispatch,* April 11, 1867, 2.

[87] "The Outrage in Wilkes County," Raleigh *Daily Standard,* July 13, 1867, 2.

head. Ball's son William struggled to defend his father as another man quickly struck him down with a club. The fight dispersed with both Confederates and Unionists fleeing the scene. Nobody died but many sustained serious injuries, including an African American man who received a stab wound.[88]

A few weeks after the riot, Robert Armfield gave his perspective of events in the Raleigh *Sentinel.* Armfield claimed to be setting the story straight, accusing Republican newspapers of slandering the Confederate men involved and exaggerating the level of violence. According to Armfield, everybody in Wilkesboro, including himself, received an open invitation to the meeting and that Republicans did not have exclusive rights to speak. Alleged members of the Heroes of America, he continued, began singing, dancing, and stomping around obnoxiously as a means of silencing the Confederate group. He excused the behavior of certain Unionists, including Samuel Smith, Alfred Stokes, and Harrison Church, placing blame only on members of the Heroes of America.[89]

The specificity with which Armfield both blamed and pardoned certain individuals and groups shows how wartime action and loyalty stood salient in the minds of mountain residents. The Heroes of America had ceased to exist in the Reconstruction period, being primarily a Civil War-era organization, yet Armfield remembered exactly which of his neighbors joined their ranks. Additionally, Armfield excused Harrison Church as being regretful of the riot. The ease in which he excused him may be because Church served, albeit briefly, as a Confederate soldier. The Wilkesboro riot exposed the fact that Civil War loyalties continued to play a part in political fighting, sometimes culminating in physical

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[88] Nash, Reconstruction's *Ragged Edge,* 73-76.

[89] "Wilkes County Correspondence: July 28th, 1867," Raleigh *Sentinel,* August 3, 1867, 1.

violence. Furthermore, the riot showed how the large number of Unionists living in Wilkes County made for a more violent and contested Reconstruction era, as defeated Confederates continued to exert themselves through any means necessary.

Political divisions infected the most stable of social institutions in the mountains, separating Unionists and Confederates into distinct worlds. In the realm of religion, southern preachers punished Union League or Red String membership with condemning sermons and sometimes expulsion. Ashe County brothers Andrew and Jason Weaver, for example, deserted the Confederate army after being conscripted in 1863, spending the last half of the war in prison. The Weaver family had pro-Republican and Unionist views, leading to their expulsion from the Big Helton Primitive Baptist Church.[90] In retaliation, ostracized Unionists formed their own religious institutions and organized a new denomination, the Mountain Union Baptists. The denomination formed in August 1867 after many disgruntled Unionists met at the home of Reverend Reizon Jones to discuss the prospects of their institution. During that first meeting, locals reported finding over ninety horses tied up outside of Jones's home, evidencing the widespread discontent among loyal citizens.[91]

The Mountain Union Baptists stood as purely a political denomination and served as a way of escaping the social marginalization that many Unionists faced. After the meeting at Reverend Jones's home, the Union Baptists officially met at Silas Creek Church in August

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[90] Crawford, *Ashe County's Civil War,* 172.

[91] J.F. Fletcher, *A History of the Ashe County North Carolina and New River, Virginia Baptist Associations* (Jefferson: Carolina Printing, 1982), 30-33; Arthur L. Fletcher, *Ashe County: A History* (Jefferson, N.C.: Ashe County Research Association, 1963), 130, 153, 161; Maj. Gen. Frank Wolcott to "General," August 16, 1866, Jonathan Worth, Letter Book, SANC.

1867. For their close association with Republican politics and wartime Unionism, secessionists referred to the church's congregants as Red Strings, whether they were members or not. Mountain Union Baptists, however, did not shy away from expressing the political reasons for their existence. During the first official congregational meeting, Reverend Jones proclaimed that "the time has come when the two parties cannot live together in the church. I'll see every rebel hung as high as Haman's gallows before I will fellowship them."[92] To these Baptists, secession and slavery tainted the South with sin, therefore making separation from Confederates necessary. In a circular letter found at the first Union Baptist meeting, Elder I.W. Landreth explained that they needed to distance themselves because "what ministers and lay members of the Baptist churches did during the late war is horrible to think of."[93]

The more peaceable Wilkes County Unionists followed in the footsteps of their Ashe County neighbors. As a means of creating their own social institutions, Wilkes County Unionists split from the Southern Baptist fellowship to create a new denomination. Similar to the Mountain Union Baptists in Ashe County, Wilkes County Union Baptists rejected the sins of slavery and secession. In a March 1867 meeting, Samuel Johnson decided to come clean with his congregation and repent of his sins. Johnson admitted that he had supported the Confederate war effort and that he even offered actual aid to the Army, although he did not specify how. For this confession, the congregation excommunicated Johnson, sending a

[92] Fletcher, *New River, Virginia Baptist,* 31.

[93] Elder I.W. Landreth, "On the Cause of our Separation," in *New River Notes* (Grayson County Virginia: Heritage Foundation Inc., 1998), https://www.newrivernotes.com/index.htm.

clear message of their hostility to anything associated with secession.[94] In a highly contested region, Wilkes County Unionists separated themselves socially and politically from their Confederate neighbors as a way of avoiding the abuses that many Unionists in the South faced.

Wilkes County remained a battleground county in North Carolina well into the 1870s and beyond. Although there existed a strong coalition of anti-Confederates during the Civil War, the ideology of conservatism and white Southern identity became the standard for most Wilkes County residents. The boiling over of anger that occurred at Wilkesboro's courthouse on July 4, 1867 only foreshadowed the rocky relations that lay ahead. In the early 1870s, election violence, Ku Klux Klan reports, and a rise in homicides characterized Wilkes County's local politics.[95]

In Caldwell County, Unionists remained too small of a minority to organize or resist conservative authority in the same way that those in Ashe and Wilkes did. There was a glaring silence from newspaper sources in detailing political events in Caldwell County. This strange absence of reports signaled that the prewar and wartime leadership stood virtually uncontested. Even travelers through the region observed this phenomenon. John Weiss Forney, a former colonel and later a correspondent for the Washington *Chronicle*, published a lengthy and vividly detailed report on affairs in Lenoir in 1869. Forney felt as if he was "surrounded with confederate veterans, confederate women, and confederate children," yet

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[94] Hayes, *The Land of Wilkes,* 116.

[95] "North Carolina, The Reign of Terror of the Liberal Ku Klux – Republicans Attacked in Several Counties," Raleigh *Weekly Era,* August 22, 1872, 4; "The Mountain Messenger Says," Goldsboro *Messenger*, September 8, 1873, 3; "North Carolina News Items, Murder," Charlotte *Democrat,* March 29, 1875, 3.

heard "no talk of politics." According to Forney, the people of Lenoir occupied themselves with overcoming their deprived state that the Civil War created. He noted that Caldwell County citizens lacked money, their infrastructure stood in shambles, and that the people acted in a depressed state. These former Confederates held "a universal desire for Northern men and capital" to restore their prosperity and make for a speedy reunion.[96]

As Steven Nash has argued, wartime loyalties were fluid and remained so after the war. Reconstruction brought an unprecedented Federal presence to the mountains of North Carolina. As western North Carolina became a stage for national and state politics, a relatively isolated community like Caldwell County had a new view of government. Similar to the Unionists growing disillusioned with the North during Stoneman's raid, many more citizens shifted their views during these unprecedented times. One citizen, William Bingham, declared that "the Yankees are gone mad." With his prewar life seemingly uprooted before his eyes, Bingham solemnly declared, "Liberty is gone forever…I would prefer next 'the Union as it was,' but that is eternally departed." The tumultuous times of Reconstruction created a sense of solidarity for many white southerners, and even Bingham could rejoice that "there is one hopeful sign…we are beginning to have what we never had before, a Southern nationality."[97] The turbulent politics of loyalty never reached a point of political clashing in Caldwell and with little Unionist dissent, one newspaper wrote, "the people here are trying to 'reconstruct' on the basis of work."[98]

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[96] Colonel J.W. Forney quoted in, "North Carolina: Letter from Col. J.W. Forney," Raleigh *Daily Standard,* February 1, 1869, 2.

[97] Col. William Bingham to Walter W. Lenoir, December 26, 1866, quoted in Hickerson, *Echoes of Happy Valley,* 112-113.

[98] "A Correspondent Writes us from Caldwell County," Charlotte *Democrat,* June 4, 1867, 3.

The course of Reconstruction depended entirely upon specific circumstances coming from the Civil War. In western North Carolina, the decision to support the national government came with detrimental consequences. Unionists formed their allegiances for practical purposes, oftentimes believing the rebellion would cause more harm to them than anything else. Although these Unionists chose to align themselves with the winning side of the war, they received no benefits for this decision in the following years. Political and social events in postwar Ashe, Wilkes, and Caldwell Counties do much to reveal this connection with the Civil War. To reconcile with their wartime defeat, former Confederates worked to retake control of their county offices as a means of retaining the local supremacy they held before the war. In their effort to marginalize their Unionist neighbors, secessionists used violence and methods of social ostracizing to continue to live in a world according to their values and politics. The presence of well-organized Unionist coalitions may have delayed the process of redemption in some counties like Wilkes, but they ultimately failed to gain enough political traction to shape the postwar society they desired.

II

"A great many Lincolnites, deserters, and conscripts:"
Anti-Confederates and Militant Unionists in the Piedmont

In November 1864, local Home Guards in Chatham County forced thirty-four-year-old Willis C. Wilson into the Confederate Army against his will. It was not the first time Wilson felt the coercive hands of his secessionist neighbors. During the fall of 1863, Wilson furnished a substitute after being conscripted and soon after fled the local militia. Like many residents in the piedmont of North Carolina, he supported the peace platform offered by Raleigh newspaper editor William Holden, seeking reunion with a constitutional endorsement of slavery. He voted for Holden over Zebulon B. Vance for governor in 1864 and eventually began attending meetings of the Heroes of America, a wartime organization seeking to protect Unionists and advance their cause in North Carolina. For these disloyal actions against the Confederacy, Wilson reflected, "I have been injured socially and my character has been attacked…I have been abused, scorned, and slighted on account of my political principles." Wilson's reputation followed him into the postwar years, as his neighbors shunned him under the threat of violence from the Ku Klux Klan. Only after state and Federal authorities began cracking down on the Klan did "men who would not speak to [Wilson] before" become "as familiar as they can be."[1]

Most piedmont residents had particularly strong interests in the Civil War's outcome. By seceding from the Union and joining a war against the United States, North Carolinians placed their cherished institutions and customs at stake. Plantation agriculture served as the

[1] Deposition of Willis C. Wilson, Questions as to Loyalty, Claim of Willis C. Wilson, Chatham County, North Carolina, Barred and Disallowed Case Files of the Southern Claims Commission, 1871-1880, accessed at https://www.fold3.com (hereafter cited as SCC).

region's economic backbone. The total value of cultivated land in the region was a staggering $1.9 million in 1860, over double that of mountain farms. Furthermore, slave labor propelled this system, making up nearly 47 percent of the piedmont's population at the start of the war.[2] Emancipation and southern defeat threatened not just the piedmont's social order, but also the region's economic viability. North Carolina Confederates, therefore, could ill-afford to allow the kind of dissent shown by citizens like Wilson.

As the Civil War progressed, some piedmont residents conducted a vast resistance movement against the Confederacy. Anti-Confederates, however, did not always agree in their motives or actions. For some, the hardships on the home front proved too much to bear as food supplies dwindled, conscription and death in battle endangered families, and tax-in-kind laws further drained resources. This group of North Carolinians acted against the Confederacy for practical reasons and opposed war simply for its lived realities. A smaller minority opposed the Confederacy on ideological grounds with some taking abolitionist stances or joining Union ranks. These Unionists supported Republican measures and imagined a more democratic South that did not serve only plantation interests at the expense of the less fortunate. Ideological Unionists often opposed slavery on moral and political grounds and rejected the values that the Confederacy fought to maintain.

Increased pressure on the plantation system also shaped Unionist sentiment in the piedmont. Embodied by the peace plan outlined by Holden in 1863 and 1864, North Carolina's more conservative Unionists desired an armistice with the North that guaranteed

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[2] *Agriculture of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census,* State of North Carolina, Anson, Chatham, Moore, Union, Wake co. (Washington D.C: National Archives), 104-111, accessed at https://www.census.gov; *1860 U.S. Census,* Population Schedule, Anson, Chatham, Moore, Union, Wake co. N.C. (Washington D.C.: National Archives), accessed at https://www.census.gov.

the preservation of slavery through constitutional means. This desire stemmed from a pessimistic view of the Confederate States, as those like Holden felt that secession inevitably doomed the South's peculiar institution. Piedmont planters held this view, as did less wealthy citizens that would rather see blacks enslaved than live amongst them as equals. No matter their goal, the different groups of anti-Confederates utilized the same means to their end: absconding from duty, enacting violence, and political maneuvering.

The variety of loyalties that existed in the piedmont and the discord within their goals and tactics created a brutal war within the state. Piedmont residents took to fighting between themselves and against regular army forces that attempted to put down localized insurrections. These conflicts led to a bitter Reconstruction period. When the war ended, most conservative Unionists joined the Conservative ranks with the defeated former Confederates, leaving the ideologically progressive Unionists and recently freed African Americans to fend for themselves. Despite their large numbers, freedmen and progressive Unionists remained largely shutout from local politics. As they did in western North Carolina, former Confederates employed violence, terror, and legal persecution to keep the old elite in power and African Americans in a condition resembling bondage.

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By late 1860 when the threat of secession loomed over the United States, North Carolina's piedmont residents expressed mixed feelings on the subject. Residents of Chatham and Moore counties hesitated to support secession and felt that war-hungry southerners put the fate of the South in great danger by threatening disunion. Inspired by Quaker influences,

residents of Chatham and Moore were more inclined to pacifism, therefore rejecting war.[3] In a January 1861 meeting held at Moore County, local leaders called South Carolina's secession "reprehensible in the highest degree" and a blatant violation of the Constitution. Furthermore, the meeting's attendants rejected their classification as "submissionists" by their fire-eating counterparts. Indeed, these men swore that if the North "threatens to invade North Carolina, for the purpose of abolishing slavery…then we will be ready for *arming* the State, and calling a Convention."[4] In nearby Chatham County, local elites appeared more favorable to secession, claiming that "a good cause and one capable of a noble defense before the civilized world, may not suffer from apparent rashness or too much haste." One local farmer disagreed, noting, "Chatham County, without distinction of party, is almost at present unanimously for the Union…only a few among us for disunion or secession."[5]

In the southernmost regions of North Carolina's piedmont, locals expressed a much stronger desire for secession. This greater inclination toward secession most likely stemmed from geography and economics. Anson and Union counties, for example, bordered the staunchly secessionist South Carolina. In the antebellum years, plank roads and railroads connected these counties with South Carolina and facilitated the exchange of goods between them. Furthermore, these roads allowed people to travel to and from the state for business or

[3] William T. Auman, *Civil War in the North Carolina Quaker Belt: The Confederate Campaign Against Peace Agitators, Deserters and Draft Dodgers* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2014), 30.

[4] "Union Meeting in Moore County," Fayetteville *Weekly Observer,* January 21, 1861, 2.

[5] "Public Meeting in Chatham County," Raleigh *Semi-Weekly Standard,* January 1, 1861, 2; "The Voice of the People," Raleigh *Weekly Standard,* January 2, 1861, 1.

pleasure.[6] Owing to this geography, counties like Anson and Union had a greater economic reliance on slavery.[7] During a Senate meeting in January 1861, state legislator Samuel Walkup expressed his pro-secessionist beliefs on behalf of his constituents in Union and Anson counties. In his speech, Walkup expressed confidence that North Carolinians would reject disunion but that counties like Anson were "as largely interested in the objects upon which a [secession] Convention might take action as any county in the State…as Anson was among the largest slaveholding counties in North Carolina." Additionally, Walkup argued that Union County contained many descendants of the American Revolution and proponents of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, making them prone to the revolutionary spirit.[8]

Not all of Anson County supported the idea of secession as Walkup assumed. Divisions could be seen in Anson County's Carolina Female College community. After the first seven southern states seceded, local secessionists flew a southern flag over the school, leading disgruntled Unionists to tear it down. The flying of secessionist flags and their subsequent removal continued multiple times. After Texas seceded on February 1, locals Adolphus Waddell, John B. Waddell, W.A. Threadgill, and James M. Wright flew a large

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[6] Mary L. Medley, *History of Anson County, North Carolina, 1750-1976* (Wadesboro, N.C.: Anson County Historical Society, 1976), 98-101.

[7] Anson County produced the third largest amount of cotton in the state, trailing only Edgecombe and Halifax Counties. Similarly, Union County produced more cotton than over eighty percent of counties. See: *Agriculture of the United States in 1860*, State of North Carolina, Anson, Union co., 104-111.

[8] "Speech of Mr. Walkup of Union Delivered in the Senate January 16th on the Convention Bill," Raleigh *Register*, January 23, 1861, 3; Union County also developed a "Southern Rights" party that frequently met and endorsed secession, see: "Southern Rights Meeting," Charlotte *Democrat,* April 9, 1861, 3, for an example.

secessionist flag that depicted North Carolina as “drooping and indecisive.” A professor followed this display with a pro-secessionist speech, leading to a confrontation. Two older men, representing the older Unionist class of Anson, climbed the roof of the school and destroyed the flag, bragging that they "cut the damn Secession Flag."[9]

On February 28, North Carolina held a vote on the question of a secession convention. When piedmont residents cast their votes, the link between slavery and support for secession became apparent. Anson, Wake, and Union counties, with a combined slave population of 19,930, voted in favor of a secession convention while Chatham and Moore, having a combined slave population less than Wake County alone, voted against it.[10] The vote was so narrow, however, that divisions continued to manifest. These animosities nearly led to violence in Wake County, particularly in the streets of Raleigh. During the week of April 9, 1861, Raleigh secessionists held a Southern Rights meeting at the local courthouse to endorse leaving the Union. Senators Thomas Bragg and Thomas Clingman began the meeting with several speeches. Secessionists newspapers reported that a “drunken crowd at the door” continuously interrupted with “such exclamations as ‘it’s a lie – go to hell’ – ‘you’re a damned liar.’” After the meeting, the paper reported, the Southern Rights men exited the courthouse to hoist a secessionist flag gifted to them by “a number of ladies” from Raleigh. Unionists threatened to tear the flag down but “the Southern Rights men declared

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[9] Medley, *History of Anson County,*104-105.

[10] *Population of the United States in 1860*; *Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census,* State of North Carolina, Anson, Chatham, Moore, Union, Wake co., North Carolina; “Election Returns,” Raleigh *Register,* March 6, 1861, 1; William T. Auman, in his study of North Carolina’s Quakers, noted that Chatham County had an unusually high slave population as compared to the rest of the Quaker regions. See: Auman, *Civil War in the North Carolina Quaker Belt,* 31-33.

they would defend it with their lives." After much commotion and flaring tempers, a Union man drew his pistol and fired on the flag. The secessionist newspaper solemnly noted that the man gave "Raleigh the unenviable distinction of having *fired upon the flag of the South.*"[11]

The Confederate firing on Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, and Lincoln's call for 75,000 volunteers to put down the rebellion three days later, however, suppressed these early signs of divisions as the majority of North Carolinians took up the cries of war. Anson County representative Thomas Ashe summarized the war spirit in claiming that North Carolina was "in the midst of revolution" and that it was "useless now to inquire who had raised it, or who was to blame; it was no time for criminations or recriminations; the party distinctions of Whigs and Democrats, Unionists and Secessionists should be forgotten, and be merged in the common purpose that ought to unite all our hearts; by gones should be by-gones."[12] Many Anson residents shared these sentiments. In reflecting on the war in 1867, Ashe disagreed with his state legislator Samuel Walkup's view of Anson allegiances, recollecting, "Anson was at first a pretty strong Union county yet when the war commenced our people were almost a unit in its support."[13]

Once it seceded from the Union on May 20, 1861, North Carolina began mobilizing rapidly. Initially, people expressed great excitement. Local women made regimental flags and sewed uniforms while men paraded the streets and formed volunteer companies. In Moore County, however, this excitement was not uniform, as the county's strong Quaker

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[11] Excerpt of the Raleigh *State Journal*, "More Rowdyism in Raleigh," published in Charlotte *Democrat,* April 9, 1861, 3.

[12] "Citizens' Meeting," Wadesboro *Argus,* May 2, 1861, 2.

[13] Thomas Ashe to Governor Worth, April 28, 1867, Jonathan Worth, Governors Papers, State Archives of North Carolina [hereafter cited as SANC].

influence made many people averse to the prospects of war. Local secessionists flocked to volunteer and celebrate North Carolina's entry into the Confederacy, while others expressed dismay and refrained from taking part. "I never saw people in so great a state of excitement," wrote one local Unionist. "All that was lacking" he continued, "was for the stars and stripes to have been planted there, with a force sufficient to defend them. They would have enlisted under that banner almost unanimously." The writer noted that Moore County did not provide recruiting officers, but that they came from Fayetteville. The writer asserted, "city people were more inclined to be secessionists than country people."[14] As local developments revealed, political, economic, and geographic divisions existed in the piedmont that set the stage for an uncoordinated and contentious war effort.

The war did not progress long before North Carolinians felt its heavy hand. For most citizens, the loss of laboring men from the home front and the resulting scarcity of food and other provisions proved to be the most detrimental byproduct of war. Many simply could not shoulder these burdens and began feverishly writing to the governor for relief. Anson County's Hugh M. May of the 3rd North Carolina Artillery, for example, begged Governor Vance for a discharge from service after serving twelve months. While on duty, May received several distressed letters from his family. He provided for his mother, wife, and children, but also his "Sister and four little children whose Father and Husband volunteered for the War and died in the service." May knew his family would continue to suffer without him, explaining, "I lost my crop by being in the service."[15] His decision to try to avoid

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[14] Bryan Tyson, *Object of the Administration in Prosecuting the War* (Washington D.C.: McGill & Witherow, 1864), 6.

[15] Hugh M. May to Governor Vance, January 5, 1863, Zebulon B. Vance, Governors Papers, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, N.C. (hereafter cited as SANC); Hugh May,

further service did not arise from any ideological basis against the Confederacy, but a practical concern for his family's well-being.

Hugh May's story highlights one fatal error of the Confederate war effort. The decision to break away from the northern states and wage war was one that catered to slaveholding interests and the elite class. Since slaveholders made up a minority of the region's population, the Confederate government expected millions of small-scale farming families to shoulder the brunt of the war effort and give this new government their full-fledged support. These families relied on their own labor for survival and could hardly spare the expenses that war required. Because war was a man's venture, four million southern white women were left at home to tend their farms and procure a living. These women put pressure on their government to provide support for them. Through written appeals or the bread riots that occurred throughout the South in 1863, women forced the Confederate government to address issues with a poor, non-slaveholding class of constituents, something they had never done.[16] As their demands made clear, the Confederacy had to gain the support of their unfranchised population in order to wage a successful war.

Suffering at home induced many men to abandon their posts, especially as many civilians complained of provision hoarding and stingy relief committees in their community. Mary Johnson of Moore County attempted to apply for financial relief in the spring of 1863, but the committee rejected her claim for petty reasons. Johnson complained bitterly to the

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Private, Co. G, 3rd North Carolina Artillery, "Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of North Carolina, National Archives: Washington D.C., accessed by https://www.fold3.com (hereafter Compiled Service Records).

[16] Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 2-4, 358-360.

governor about the rejection reminding him that “necessity knows no law.”[17] This failure to obtain food or money led soldiers like Isaac Thompson of the Forty-Sixth North Carolina Infantry to act independently. After deserting the ranks, Thompson asked for a pardon, explaining that "it was not the hardships of the camp nor the exposure of myself to Yankee bullets that brought me away, but my family being destitute of the necisarys [sic] of life." Thompson, like Mary Johnson, exposed his local relief committee for hoarding funds designated for suffering families. He spoke for many piedmont soldiers: “when I volunteered it was to fight for the protection of my family and when I left the army I thought if my family had to perish what profit would it be for me to fight.”[18]

Those soldiers that left the army to assist their families, along with many disaffected citizens on North Carolina's home front, did not reject the Confederacy on political grounds but rather began to oppose war for all the distress it caused. Confederate war policies deemed oppressive, however, alienated many North Carolinians and gave anti-Confederates political reasoning for their contempt. Much like in the mountains, conscription and tax-in-kind laws riled up the severest backlash within in the state. In late 1862, George Richards of the Twenty-Sixth North Carolina Infantry informed his former colonel and current governor, Zebulon Vance, of several plots to avoid conscription in Union County. Richards accused the local militia captain, Stanley Austin, of disloyalty, suspecting that he worked to give out exemptions to as many people as he could. He singled out eight different men as giving lousy

[17] Mary Johnson to Governor Vance, May 5, 1863, Zebulon B. Vance, Governors Papers, SANC.

[18] Isaac Thompson to Governor Vance, October 29, 1863, Zebulon B. Vance, Governors Papers, SANC; Isaac Thompson, Private, Co. H, 46th North Carolina Infantry, Compiled Service Records.

excuses to avoid military service, their true motive being speculating, cowardice, or treachery. "I saw enough," Richards complained, "to disgust a number of the Old 26th NC."[19] From its earliest implementation in the spring of 1862, conscription laws proved widely unpopular.

Like their mountain counterparts, many piedmont North Carolinians shifted their loyalty to the Union or simply took an anti-war or anti-Confederate stance once conscription affected their lives. Cabot Powell of Raleigh served in Wake County's local Home Guard under compulsion and against his principles. Ordered to hunt for deserters and impress property, Powell grew resentful of his home state and began speaking out against the Confederacy. In one instance, Powell said that "the conscript law was the work of the devil," warranting the threat of prison time by his secessionist neighbors.[20] Similarly, Calvin J. Rogers of Wake County experienced a change in loyalty after conscription took his sons in 1863. Rogers owned over forty slaves and even served in North Carolina's state legislature during the war. Rogers attempted to keep his sons out of the military but one volunteered under communal pressure while the other was forcibly conscripted. Rogers eventually helped his conscripted son out of service and began actively opposing the Confederacy. His neighbors recalled that local secessionists "said he was a rebel to the Confederate states" for his opposition stemming from conscription.[21]

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[19] George Richards to Governor Vance, December 19, 1862, Zebulon B. Vance, Governors Papers, SANC.

[20] Deposition of Cabot Powell, Questions as to Loyalty, Claim of Cabot Powell, Wake County, N.C., Barred and Disallowed Claims, SCC.

[21] Testimony to Loyalty, Grandison Philport, Claim of Calvin J. Rogers, Wake County, N.C., Barred and Disallowed Claims, SCC.

Resistance to the Confederacy became more ideological with the rise of William Woods Holden and the peace movement he orchestrated in the summer of 1863 in Raleigh. The desire for a peace settlement in North Carolina arose directly out of the war's hardships that created a widespread defeatist mentality. Pessimistic North Carolinians grew hopeful that a peace settlement would be possible especially seeing the growing Democrat influence in the North. Holden and his followers stood opposed to emancipation, often using the slogan "the Constitution as it is, the Union as it was."[22] Holden used his newspaper, the Raleigh *Standard*, as a platform to accuse Governor Vance and the state's secessionists of dragging North Carolinians into a war in which they had no interest, often emphasizing the apparent abuses of power coming from the Confederate government. His writings proved influential and stoked the flames of resistance that already existed. More consequently, Holden's message gave rise to a militant anti-Confederate movement across the piedmont.[23]

Militant resistance to the Confederacy proved to be strong in Chatham and Moore counties. This resistance came primarily from recusant conscripts and deserters from the army that banded themselves together to resist and fight enrolling officers, local militia, and Home Guard units. In April 1863, a former member of the Twenty-Sixth North Carolina in Moore County alerted Governor Vance that "in this and adjoining counties there must be near one hundred deserters," pillaging and robbing locals. According to the writer, citizens

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[22] Auman, *Civil War in the North Carolina Quaker Belt,* 78- 80.

[23] Holden's peace movement led to the organization of several peace meetings throughout the piedmont in the summer of 1863. See: Raleigh *Semi-Weekly Standard,* August 28, 1863, issue for a list of public meetings endorsing peace; "Discussion at Carthage," Raleigh *Weekly Standard,* September 9, 1863, 1; "Public Meeting in Chatham County," Raleigh *Semi-Weekly Standard,* August 11, 1863, 1; "The Standard's Treason," Raleigh *Weekly Register,* August 19, 1863, 2.

were powerless to protect themselves because "the deserters are generally better armed than the citizens" and they "threaten vengeance on every man who takes an active part in apprehending them." More alarming, however, their exploits had "a very demoralizing effect on the soldiers who remain in the army to allow these cowards to remain at home." These militant factions kept locals on high alert and kept the region in a state of anxiety. The writer expressed the fear they caused: "I hope you may never be in as great danger of Yankee bullets as you were at Newbern and Malvern Hill. I confess that I feel in more danger at home than I did at either of those places." As reports of these abuses kept coming to Vance, he sent several detachments of troops to these disaffected piedmont counties.[24]

As troops entered Chatham and Moore, violence worsened, especially as they made arrests. In Moore County, the 51st Militia sent to apprehend deserters informed Vance that the anti-Confederates stormed the Carthage jail, freeing multiple people that had been arrested for desertion.[25] The forces that Vance sent could also make matters worse by committing depredations in their struggle to identify those disloyal to the Confederacy. In several instances, militia units impressed property from locals to draw out deserters, sometimes causing the reverse effect. They also frequently disarmed locals, leaving them defenseless against attack.[26] The struggle to identify militant anti-Confederates could also lead to wrongful death. A Chatham Justice of the Peace informed Vance of one brutal instance in

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[24] Richard Street to Governor Vance, April 10, 1863, Zebulon B. Vance, Governors Papers, SANC; Auman, *Civil War in the North Carolina Quaker Belt,* 54.

[25] Members of the 51st N.C. Militia to Governor Vance, July 18, 1863, Zebulon B. Vance, Governors Papers, SANC.

[26] Militia officers were known to take guns out of suspected Unionists' houses even if they were innocent of such charges. See: Hugh C. Hardin to Governor Vance, May 28, 1863, Zebulon B. Vance, Governors Papers, SANC.

which militia soldiers shot and killed a young man by the name of Phillips at his parents' home. Enraged, his parents demanded an arrest warrant on the charges of murder against the militia, but this never came to fruition.[27] The suppression of anti-Confederates only worsened problems in these communities as neighbors grew distrustful of one another and militia units proved to be as much of a liability as militant deserters.

As anti-Confederates and militia forces continued to clash, more influential men joined the movement. Bryan Tyson, a wealthy slave owner from Moore County, led his county's militant movement but also published indictments of the Confederacy and the war effort. Tyson avoided conscription in 1862, and local Home Guards subsequently arrested him. While in jail, Tyson published the pamphlet, *A Ray of Light: A Treatise on the Sectional Troubles, Religiously and Morally Considered.* He sent this publication to Jefferson Davis and Alexander Stephens, and eventually distributed it amongst northerners after a Chatham County Quaker, Joshua Moon, guided Tyson to the Federal lines in New Bern.[28] Many disaffected North Carolinians shared Tyson's view, and his 1862 publication even inspired the writings of Holden and his peace movement. In reflecting on his work, Tyson recalled "I…availed myself of every opportunity to stab the confederacy…I, with others, visited the Southern army, and I co-operated with said persons in influencing desertions."[29] Tyson believed "it was our politicians rather than the masses of the people, that seceded. Secession

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[27] Chesty Jones to Governor Vance, June 24, 1863, Zebulon B. Vance, Governors Papers, SANC.

[28] Auman, *Civil War in the North Carolina Quaker Belt,* 52-53. Auman explains that piedmont Unionists formed an "Underground Railroad" that was used to pilot Unionists throughout the country, into the lines of federal forces.

[29] Bryan Tyson quoted in Auman, *Civil War in the North Carolina Quaker Belt,* 52.

[was] inaugurated and brought about by a species of corruption and usurpation, the most vile that was ever palmed on an innocent people."[30] Tyson's work helped anti-Confederate resistance, and his multiple arrests—including one for "publishing incendiary documents"—revealed his influence.[31]

Ideological Unionists solidified their strength by forming the secret Heroes of America (HOA), an underground organization pledged to protecting southern Unionists and harming the Confederacy. Bryan Tyson joined the HOA, the stage in which he conducted most of his anti-Confederate work.[32] The first public notice of the HOA came from Chatham County in which "the veritable existence of this confederation of traitors and conspirators" made newspaper headlines.[33] Secessionists branded nearly every anti-Confederate as a member, including Holden and his affiliates. One newspaper charged, "these men are all members of the 'H.O.A's,' and are said to have been emboldened in their career of lawless violence." According to the article, "there are now three candidates for the Legislature" from Chatham County that unabashedly touted their HOA membership. "It is very much feared," the writer continued, "that they will overawe the people and take possession of the polls."[34]

The influence of the HOA and anti-Confederates became widespread. Many piedmont Unionists reflected on their loyalties using some of the same rhetoric employed by

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[30] Tyson, *Object of the Administration in Prosecuting the War,* 8.

[31] "A Bad Book," Fayetteville *Weekly Observer*, September 1, 1862, 3; "Arrested," Wadesboro *Argus,* October 30, 1862, 2.

[32] Auman, *Civil War in the North Carolina Quaker Belt,* 52.

[33] "The 'H.O.A.'s' --- Further Disclosures," Raleigh *Weekly Conservative*, July 20, 1864, 1.

[34] "'Heroes' in Chatham," Raleigh *Weekly Conservative,* August 3, 1864, 1.

Holden. Edward Chappell of House Creek in Wake County, for example, believed that "if the south had succeeded we would…have had here one of the most tyrannical Governments under the sun."[35] Mary Waler of Union County noted the influence of anti-Confederates in her neighborhood, writing to Vance at the height of the peace movement: "at the commencement of this war I was through peculiar circumstances located in a portion of country where the people are poor, illiterate, & now almost everyone around me is tories."[36] The HOA sparked rumors and caused hysteria, as one Chatham secessionist warned Vance that they intended on arming slaves.[37] Locals also began noticing that militant anti-Confederates spared Unionists and targeted the more enthusiastic secessionists, giving the perception that the organization had been gaining members rapidly.[38] This fear spread as Unionists became emboldened to act politically. In the gubernatorial race of 1864, for example, Moore County newspapers estimated that groups of 200 deserters hijacked the polls and voted for Holden, and rumors spread that even the local militia voted for Holden.[39] North Carolina's piedmont seemed to be on the brink of insurrection.

As anti-Confederate resistance became more militant and ideological, secessionists blamed deceitful propaganda coming from Holden and his conspirators. As HOA rumors

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[35] Deposition of Edward Chappell, Questions as to Loyalty, Claim of Edward Chappell, Wake County, N.C., Barred and Disallowed Claims, SCC.

[36] Mary K. Waler to Governor Vance, June 7, 1863, Zebulon B. Vance, Governors Papers, SANC.

[37] Auman, *Civil War in the North Carolina Quaker Belt,* 76.

[38] Auman, *Civil War in the North Carolina Quaker Belt,* 185.

[39] "Outrages in Moore County," Fayetteville *Semi-Weekly Observer,* August 11, 1864, 3; "Deserters Voting at the Election" Fayetteville *Weekly Observer,* August 15, 1864, 3. Auman, *Civil War in the North Carolina Quaker Belt,* 161-162.

circulated and more North Carolinians appeared to join their ranks, secessionist newspapers and politicians blamed Holden for inciting a class war.[40] This charge was not completely unfounded, as Unionist leaders began critiquing Confederate war policies for seemingly sparing the wealthy at the expense of the poor. Before the outbreak of war, the state's piedmont region already suffered from great wealth inequalities. Historian William Auman showed that 26-30 percent of the population in the region consisted of landless whites, making a "permanent class" of poor people in the state.[41] In July 1862, a Chatham County secessionist spoke for these less fortunate citizens by protesting the way that North Carolina's government had treated its people. The writer admitted that he and his neighbors only sided with the Confederacy after Lincoln called for volunteers to put down the rebellion, but that war policies threatened to push people like him back into Unionist support. "There are those in our midst," he griped, "who are willing to bind heavy burdens, and lay them on men's shoulders while they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. Such are those that are now in power."[42]

One of these inequitable burdens came from the Confederacy's tax-in-kind laws, appropriating one-tenth of local farmers' marketable produce. These laws caused much anxiety among small-scale farmers, as many could not afford to spare any bit of their harvest. Moore County farmers responded in a Raleigh newspaper, "poor people have a very bad chance in this country now. They are suffering greatly by the way, and they want peace."

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[40] Auman, *Civil War in the North Carolina Quaker Belt,* 164.

[41] Auman, *Civil War in the North Carolina Quaker Belt,* 30-33.

[42] "For the Standard," Raleigh *Weekly Standard,* August 6, 1862, 4.

They accused lawmakers and politicians of profiting off of the war.[43] In Union County, locals could not believe that the Confederate government passed such a measure. One local, Thomas Long, wrote to Governor Vance, "there is some confusion among the people in this section of country about this law…if it is a law I don't know how we will get along with it." According to Long, "speculation has put up [prices] so high that poor people cannot buy" food or provisions.[44]

An analysis of the piedmont's wealthier counties reveals the inequalities created by Confederate policies. Holding 6,951 slaves, Anson County's slave population stood higher than roughly 85 percent of North Carolina's counties.[45] These high numbers of slaves can also be seen in enlistment records. In company K of the Twenty-Sixth North Carolina Infantry, 45 percent of Anson County enlistees came from slaveholding households, more than twice the regiment's average and nearly three times more than Chatham's G company. Additionally, Anson's company average wealth totaled a staggering $17,791, four times higher than the average of all five piedmont-based companies in the regiment. Wealth and desertion coincided, as only 3 percent of Anson men deserted their ranks as compared to the 16 percent average in Union County's company B or the 11 percent average in Moore's company H.[46] Anson County also contributed only 1.5 percent of its population as conscripts,

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[43] "Public Sentiment," *Semi-Weekly Standard,* February 20, 1863, 3.

[44] Thomas Long to Governor Vance, December 29, 1863, Zebulon B. Vance, Governors Papers, SANC.

[45] *1860 U.S. Census,* Population Schedule, Anson, co. N.C. (Washington D.C.: National Archives), accessed at https://www.census.gov.

[46] John W. Moore, *Roster of North Carolina Troops in the War Between the States,* Vol. 2 (Raleigh: Presses of Edwards, Broughton & Co., 1882), 362-406; *1860 U.S. Census,* Anson, Chatham, Moore, Union, Wake co., N.C., pop. Sch. (Washington D.C.: National Archives).

one of the lowest in the entire state.[47] Unlike in other counties Anson residents seldom wrote to the state governor about widespread resistance or insurrection within their community. Rather, the substantial number of elites in the county actively participated in the rebellion. James Boggan, a local elite of over $33,000 in wealth, devised a plan for destroying Union gunboats within the state's borders. Local elites regarded Boggan as a man of high standing and character, going as far as signing his letter as a voucher. Governor Vance also found the plan convincing, as he recommended Boggan's plan to Richmond's Department of Engineering.[48]

Inequalities among piedmont residents did not necessarily mean that wealthy citizens or slaveholders supported the Confederacy unconditionally. Indeed, the militant unionist Bryan Tyson came from a slave-owning family of wealth.[49] In his 1864 publication, *Object of the Administration in Prosecuting the War,* Tyson argued that Lincoln perverted the meaning of the war against the South to one with "the purpose of freeing the negroes rather than restoring the Union." Despite this, Tyson charged the South with being reckless and the southern Confederacy as an illegitimate government that had continuously oppressed its people. He explained, "I am for compelling [the South] to obey the established laws of the land, and if this cannot be done without bloodshed, it must be done with bloodshed." Finally, Tyson argued that he spoke for the masses of southern Unionists and that their disdain for the

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[47] Auman, *Civil War in the North Carolina Quaker Belt,* 30-33.

[48] James Boggan to Governor Vance, September 17, 1862, Zebulon B. Vance, Governors Papers, SANC; James Boggan to Governor Vance, April 24, 1863, Zebulon B. Vance, Governors Papers, SANC; *1860 U.S. Census*, Anson Co., N.C., pop. Sch. (Washington D.C.: National Archives), accessed at https://ancestry.com.

[49] Auman, *Civil War in the North Carolina Quaker Belt,* 48-50.

Confederacy only arose out of anti-war sentiments. For southern Unionists to accept peace with the North, Tyson outlined, slavery must remain intact because, "we [southern Unionists], who have expended our money by hundreds and thousands, and imperiled our lives also…do not desire to see a mock Union."[50] Ultimately, Tyson and his followers opposed the Confederacy because they felt the war served as a direct threat to southern institutions and the security of southern rights.

The evident threat against slavery that the Civil War posed turned many slave owners against the Confederacy. In 1863, Chatham County planters flooded Governor Vance's office with letters of complaint detailing the disruption to slavery that had been occurring. These planters primarily took issue with the Confederacy's slave appropriation laws that disrupted local farming and the prevailing social order. G.W. Goldston wrote Vance in April 1863, "there has now been taken from this county 120 Negroes." Unfortunately for these planters, many slaves escaped in their time away from home, either absconding while traveling or coming across Union forces. With most of the military-aged white males gone to war, these runaway slaves allegedly returned to their old communities "to steal & pilfer." More importantly, the loss of slave labor made farming increasingly difficult. The 120 slaves taken from Chatham proved to be a tremendous loss, as Goldston lamented, "starvation is now staring us in the face."[51] Slave appropriation angered Chatham County's local planters and poorer farmers because they saw the measure as illegal and it made food alarmingly scarce. William J. Header irritably wrote Vance in the spring of 1863, "I do not recollect the

[50] Tyson, *Object of the Administration in Prosecuting the War,* 3-8.

[51] G.W. Goldston to Governor Vance, April 15, 1863, Zebulon B. Vance, Governors Papers, SANC.

provisions of the law authorizing the Governor to employ slave labor on fortifications…they have now been there six weeks of a very busy season of the year."[52] The problems with wheat harvests only worsened as conscription took millers and processors away from home, leading a group of citizens to petition the Governor for a detachment of troops to help make the harvest.[53]

From the time the peace movement began in the summer of 1863 until the fall of 1864, Governor Vance embarked on a wholesale suppression of anti-Confederate dissent. In May 1863, he issued a proclamation against deserters, recusant conscripts, and any anti-Confederates aiding them, publicly shaming them and promising harsh consequences. Vance encouraged citizens to treat them as traitors and enemies to the country, even suggesting they kill disloyal Confederates. "The father or the brother who [aids a deserter] should be shot," he proclaimed, "for he deliberately destroys the soul and manhood of his own flesh and blood." His proclamation marked the beginning of a harsh crackdown against anti-Confederates, coming from the citizens themselves rather than soldiers. Vance requested that "all good citizens and true patriots" join together to "assist my officers in arresting deserters." He suggested they "place the brand upon them and make them feel the scorn and contempt of an outraged people." In a moment of foreshadowing, Vance made a promise to anti-Confederates and Unionists: "You will be hustled from the polls, insulted in the streets, a

[52] William J. Header to Governor Vance, May 31, 1863, Zebulon B. Vance, Governors Papers, SANC.

[53] Petitioners to Governor Vance, June 3, 1863, Zebulon B. Vance, Governors Papers, SANC; Petitioners to Governor Vance, June 17, 1863, Zebulon B. Vance, Governors Papers, SANC.

jury of your countrymen will not believe you on oath, and honest men everywhere will shun you as a pestilence."[54]

Vance's endorsement of violence and marginalization toward Unionists instilled confidence in piedmont secessionists to take action against their neighbors. In Panther Branch, Wake County, for example, Mordecai Parrish and his family became branded within his community. His neighbor remembered, "he and his family incurred the displeasure of all the secessionists in the neighborhood, both publicly and privately," and that they believed "the whole Parrish family ought to be driven out of the country."[55] Similarly, Clinton W. Williams of Wake lost his communal standing for joining the Heroes of America. He and his family "were under the ban," one neighbor recalled, "not recognized as among the respectable society."[56] These stigmatizations came with serious consequences for some. Henry Holder of Williams Township in Chatham County, for example, lost many privileges in his community. A local store owner, Marmaduke Williams, refused to serve Holder anymore and threatened to have him arrested. More consequential, however, "the secessionists threatened to turn out [Unionists] of the places they rented."[57]

Piedmont Confederates could only do so much to suppress Unionist activity. As the summer of 1864 approached and Vance defeated Holden for governor, newspapers continued

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[54] "Vance's Proclamation," reprinted in the Raleigh *Weekly Standard,* April 15, 1868, 4.

[55] Deposition of Thomas L. Banks, Questions as to Loyalty, Claim of Mordecai Parrish, Wake County, North Carolina, Approved Claims, SCC.

[56] Deposition of Curtis Brogden, Questions as to Loyalty, Claim of Clinton W. Williams, Wake County, North Carolina, Approved Claims, SCC.

[57] Deposition of Willis C. Wilson, Questions as to Loyalty, Claim of Henry Holder, Chatham County, North Carolina, Disallowed Claims, SCC.

to report depredations committed by deserters and militant Unionists. Vance's victory over Holden greatly increased violence as Unionists felt their cause was lost.[58] In August, deserters in the central piedmont, including Chatham and Moore counties, took to killing Home Guards and citizens attempting to apprehend them.[59] Worse yet, Home Guard soldiers began defecting, greatly curbing any Confederate progress toward ending insurrection. Vance expressed outrage in the North Carolina legislature, suggesting confiscation and arrest for those disloyal Home Guards saying, "those who seek the aid of our enemies should share the fate of our enemies!"[60] In late August, Vance announced his fourth campaign against anti-Confederates in the piedmont. As part of this operation, Vance sent twenty-eight battalions of Junior and Senior Reserves and regular army forces to the piedmont, including the counties of Chatham, Moore, and Union. In a change of strategy, Vance ordered them to confiscate property and hold any suspected anti-Confederates, including their families, under arrest. As William Auman aptly noted, "Vance had abdicated his traditional role as defender of civil liberties" in his efforts to sustain a united war effort.[61]

The use of soldiers as well as their orders to confiscate property and use any means necessary in arresting anti-Confederates proved successful. John G. Andrews of Wake County recalled that the mass deserter hunt forced him out of his home and into the forest,

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[58] Auman, *Civil War in the North Carolina Quaker Belt,*161-162.

[59] "Outrages of Deserters and Tories," Charlotte *Democrat,* August 23, 1864, 3.

[60] Zebulon B. Vance quoted in "The Record of the Instigators and Leaders of the Rebellion," Raleigh *Daily Standard,* January 24, 1867, 2.

[61] Auman, *Civil War in the North Carolina Quaker Belt,* 167.

where he lived for over a year.[62] Rather than submit to Confederate authority, Andrews swore "he would lay in the woods until the moss grew on his back."[63] This decision proved costly, however, as Andrews lost most of his personal belongings as a result of hiding out.[64] Vance's proclamation against anti-Confederates implicated not just the offenders but their families. William Perry of New Light Township in Wake experienced this firsthand. Not only did deserter hunters arrest Perry because he protected his sons from conscription, but they also shot his son in the arm and executed his nephew while tied to a tree. Even his wife and daughter suffered insults from rebel cavalry.[65] Perry's Unionist neighbors recalled, "He would not have been treated in that way if he had not been a Union man. They did not treat the secessionists in that way."[66]

Deserter hunters also targeted influential political enemies. William Holden fled for his safety in Raleigh on multiple occasions as Confederate troops and deserter hunters attempted to arrest him. Because Holden kickstarted the peace movement and proved influential in creating branches of the HOA in Wake County, he had many Unionist allies to assist him. James W. Buck for example took Holden into his home for hiding and swore he

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[62] Deposition of John G. Andrews, Claim of John G. Andrews, Wake County, N.C., Approved Claims, SCC.

[63] Witness Testimony, Deposition of George W. Crockett, Claim of John G. Andrews, Wake County, N.C., Approved Claims, SCC.

[64] Witness Testimony, Deposition of William Parrish, Claim of John G. Andrews, Wake County, N.C., Approved Claims, SCC.

[65] Deposition of William Perry, Claim of William Perry, Wake County, N.C., Approved Claims, SCC.

[66] Witness Testimony, Deposition of John Pierce, Claim of William Perry, Wake County, N.C., Approved Claims, SCC.

would defend him with his life by using his personal "artillery."[67] Wake County native Clinton Williams, the ostracized HOA member, also took Holden in after Confederate troops sacked his office for the Raleigh *Standard* and forced him from the city for three weeks.[68] To return the favor for the men that aided him, Holden helped to gain appointments for his closest allies to certain civil positions to keep out of the military. Benjamin Y. Rogers of Raleigh, "forced by the overwhelming popular current," joined the Home Guard to avoid conscription, but Holden helped him obtain a position as a Justice of the Peace to avoid further service.[69] For piedmont Unionists, cooperation of this sort was the only assurance of their safety, but their smaller numbers could not withstand the intensity of Vance's last deserter hunt.

By late September 1864, Vance and North Carolina's secessionists could proclaim victory over the anti-Confederates, as over 300 deserters and Unionists turned themselves in during one hunt.[70] Despite their successes, many North Carolinians, regardless of political principles, spoke out against the brutality of Vance's suppression campaign. A conservative newspaper in Raleigh celebrated the successful apprehension of militant Unionists but felt "bound as a public journalist to refer to a rumor, which for the honor, and good name of our State, we hope is not true." The rumor held that "officers of the Home Guard, acting under

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[67] Witness Testimony of William Holden, Claim of James W. Buck, Wake County, N.C., Approved Claims, SCC.

[68] Witness Testimony of William Holden, Claim of Clinton W. Williams, Wake County, N.C., Approved Claims, SCC.

[69] Statement of William Holden and Deposition of Benjamin Rogers, Questions as to Loyalty, Claim of Benjamin Y. Rogers, Wake County, N.C., Disallowed Claims, SCC.

[70] "Deserters Surrendered and Taken," Fayetteville *Semi-Weekly Standard,* September 29, 1864, 2; "Deserters Coming in," Fayetteville *Weekly Observer,* September 19, 1864, 3.

orders from Headquarters at Raleigh, have arrested whole families, including women and children, and placed them in camp," sometimes for days.[71] Prominent lawyer, judge, and Confederate Thomas Settle wrote to Vance of these atrocities that "in Chatham…some fifty women….& some of them in delicate health and far advanced in pregnancy were rudely (in some instances) dragged from their homes & put under close guard…The consequences in some instances have been shocking."[72]

The brutality in which North Carolina's Confederate government quelled internal rebellion no doubt turned many more against the war, but whatever the negative consequences were, Vance's suppression campaign ended successfully. In Chatham and Moore, where anti-Confederate resistance thrived, conflict declined dramatically. Unionists held only one peace meeting in 1864 after the deserter hunt. No anti-Confederates held meetings in Union or Anson. Wake County, the center stage of North Carolina's peace movement, remained active as Holden and his followers conducted seven peace meetings, the highest in the state.[73] As the Civil War came to a close, North Carolina's piedmont stood fiercely divided. Local secessionists made the price of resisting Confederate hegemony high and well-known throughout their communities, and their suppression tactics remained unabated even through defeat in war. In the postwar years, piedmont Unionists fought to capitalize on Confederate defeat but would face the same brutal obstacles they did during the war.

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[71] "Arrest of Deserters," Raleigh *Daily Progress,* September 29, 1864, 2.

[72] Thomas Settle quoted in Auman, *Civil War in the North Carolina Quaker Belt,* 174.

[73] Auman, *Civil War in the North Carolina Quaker Belt,* 131-133.

At the end of April 1865, Ohio *State Journal* correspondent George W. Pepper traveled to Wake County and surrounding localities in the piedmont to observe how residents dealt with the end of the war. Pepper called piedmont residents "more dignified, industrious and patriotic" than most southerners and observed that "the Union element in Raleigh is very strong." He predicted that "When the history of this war is written, it will be found that the Washington Administration had no firmer or more outspoken friends," than the piedmont's Unionists.[74] Indeed, in the first months following the end of the war, residents from several piedmont counties began organizing to celebrate their triumph, a moment for which Holden declared two-thirds of North Carolina had been waiting.[75] In Raleigh, speakers rejoiced that residents had been "disenthralled from a tyranny so galling, and could again assemble as free men under the glorious old flag." Nearby in Chatham, Confederates seemingly disappeared "and a universal determination never to vote for or trust secessionists again was expressed."[76] As piedmont residents from several counties echoed these sentiments, George Pepper's observations seemed to ring true. Ensuing developments would show, however, that the Unionist element in North Carolina's piedmont appeared stronger than it truly was. By 1871, secessionists and former Confederates in the piedmont successfully wrested control of local government from Unionists and freedmen.[77]

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[74] "What Our Northern Friends Say of Our City," Raleigh *Daily Standard,* May 1, 1865, 1.

[75] William Holden, no title, Raleigh *Daily Standard,* April 27, 1865, 2.

[76] "Union Mass Meeting in Raleigh," Raleigh *Daily Standard,* May 12, 1865, 2; "Union Meeting at New Hill," Raleigh *Daily Progress,* June 5, 1865, 2. Moore County residents also held meetings, welcoming citizens from surrounding counties. See: "Union Meeting in Moore County," Raleigh *Daily Progress,* May 18, 1865, 2.

[77] Mark Bradley, *Bluecoats & Tar Heels: Soldiers and civilians in Reconstruction North Carolina* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2009), 248.

Widespread wartime resistance to the Confederacy led Holden and his following to the assumption that the vast majority of piedmont residents considered themselves "straight-sect" Unionists.[78] When appointed Provisional Governor of North Carolina in May 1865, Holden felt optimistic that he could reshape the state on these terms. Most of these supposed Unionists, however, supported the values for which the Confederacy fought and only opposed war and disunion as the method for protecting them. A federal commissioner for the Southern Claims Commission summarized the situation in North Carolina: "they opposed secession when the question was first presented, earnestly & vigorously, but when their state seceded…& their neighbors, their friends, & their kindred were in arms on the southern side, they were unable to withstand the surrounding influences & naturally drifted…to the side of the Confederacy." When "the war in all its horrors was actually upon them," many followed Holden's peace movement and "this class of persons were & are today called by such others & by their neighbors, 'Union men.'"[79]

The piedmont's lack of deep ideological support for Unionism is apparent in an examination of enlistment records from the region. Very few piedmont residents enlisted in the Union army, despite displaying high levels of resistance to the Confederacy. The 1890 Veterans Schedules show that no men from Anson or Union counties served in Federal ranks, while only twenty-five men total between Chatham and Moore volunteered. Although thirty-

[78] "Straight-sect" Unionists defined themselves as "the original and consistent Union men." Straight-sect Unionists rebuked secession and the Confederacy both prior to and during the war and supported the Union on ideological grounds. After the war, these Unionists tended to support Republican measures as a means of restoring the state to the Union. See: William Holden, no title, Raleigh *Daily Standard,* January 29, 1866.

[79] Commissioner Remarks, Claim of Edward Chappell, Wake County, N.C., Barred and Disallowed Claims, SCC.

four men from Wake County are listed in these schedules, most were not natives of North Carolina, but northern soldiers that relocated South. The combined total of Union veterans from these five piedmont counties is less than Ashe and Wilkes counties alone.[80]

Whatever Unionism existed in the piedmont dwindled quickly as the Union army crossed into North Carolina. In March 1865, Union County planter D.A. Covington watched as soldiers under General William T. Sherman plundered his community. The Union forces took his slaves, livestock, and burnt his fences. Covington angrily observed, "those heartless wretches…burnt, fed away and wasted" the harvests of many farmers in Union and Anson counties, declaring that "starvation is looking us sternly in the face." Any hopes of Covington supporting the Union vanished when Federal soldiers held him and his wife at gunpoint to steal gold, leaving him to ask, "is this the way to coax us back into the Union?"[81] In Wake County, Frances Snelling recalled that despite her husband's Unionist sentiment, "the Yankee soldiers…treated him very badly." In one instance, they dragged him from his house, tied a rope around his neck, and demanded money. Only when one of Snelling's slaves intervened did they release him.[82] In nearby House Creek, Lemuel S. Perry noted that his neighbor was a known Unionist, "but if he has [changed his sentiments] it has been caused

[80] *1890 U.S. Census,* Anson, Chatham, Moore, Union, Wake, Co., N.C., "Special Schedules of the Eleventh Census Enumerating Union Veterans and Widows of Union Veterans of the Civil War" (Washington D.C., National Archives), accessed at https://www.ancestry.com.

[81] D.A. Covington, "Depredation of the Enemy," Raleigh *Daily Confederate,* March 24, 1865, 2.

[82] Deposition of Frances Snelling, Questions as to Loyalty, Claim of Frances Snelling, Wake County, N.C. Approved Claims, SCC.

by the treatment he received at the close of the war from the United States soldiers."[83] Piedmont residents had few, if any, interactions with Federal entities, making these negative interactions with Union soldiers crucial in swaying their loyalty.

The variety of loyalties that existed in the piedmont caused much confusion among Reconstruction-era politicians and the non-native Union officers entering the region. In the closing days of April, the *Standard* reported that remnants of Confederate cavalry continued to resist the war's outcome. "The original secessionists and war Vanceites," the paper observed, "are in the habit…of denying their political opinions and pointing out Union men as secessionists."[84] Leading former Confederates capitalized on this confusion in Raleigh. Henry King Burgwyn, father of the colonel of the Twenty-Sixth North Carolina who had been killed at Gettysburg, cozied himself with occupying Union officers, allegedly slandering some of the state's well-known Unionists, like William Holden, in an effort to procure favors for secessionists.[85] Former Confederates proved successful at finessing themselves into positions of power in Chatham County. In June, Wake County Unionist Thomas Long warned Governor Holden that Union officers had recommended to him former secessionists for almost all of Chatham's local offices. According to Long, a former captain and two lieutenants of the Confederate Army procured an appointment while the appointees for sheriff and magistrates were staunch secessionists. "I think you have been imposed upon," Long worried, claiming that some of the county's most popular Unionists had been

[83] Witness Testimony as to Loyalty, Deposition of Lemuel S. Perry, Claim of Edward Chappell, Wake County, N.C., Barred and Disallowed, SCC.

[84] No title, Raleigh *Standard,* April 27, 1865, 2.

[85] William Holden, no title, Raleigh *Standard,* May 6, 1865, 2.

passed over in favor of former Confederates.[86] Just two months after the end of the war, Chatham's antebellum leaders retained a grip on local politics.

While straight-sect Unionism seemed to disappear in the piedmont, former rebels indicated they would remain unrepentant. In the summer of 1865, military officials reported that in Wake County, former slave-owners continued to treat freedpeople as they had before the war. The beating and whipping of black women continued egregiously, as five of the county's wealthiest elites beat their former slaves until near death. In another instance, a planter shot and killed a freedman because he no longer needed his labor.[87] Former secessionists attempted to cling to the past through the courts as well. In Chatham County, where former Confederates quickly regained their seats as magistrates, civil suits arose directly out of wartime circumstances and targeted Unionists and anti-Confederates. When conscripted in 1862, seventeen-year-old James Gilliam escaped to the Union lines at New Bern, stealing the horse of his secessionist neighbor Stanley Coble to facilitate his journey. After the war, Gilliam gave Coble a horse of lesser value, so Coble decided to prosecute him. Gilliam's mother Sophia, an impoverished widow, offered Coble $75 and later $200 in addition to the indentured labor of her son in order to stop the prosecution. Because Gilliam acted as a recusant conscript, however, Coble wanted retribution rather than money. He

[86] Thomas B. Long to Governor Holden, June 29, 1865, William W. Holden, Governors Papers, SANC.

[87] Bradley, *Bluecoats & Tar Heels,* 68.

declined all offers from Sophia and James and obtained a warrant for his arrest, forcing James into hiding.[88]

Piedmont Conservatives using the local courts as a means of suppressing Unionist influence had roots in the antebellum era. Prior to Reconstruction, North Carolina law required property ownership for magistrates and each county appointed roughly fifty to one hundred magistrates. As Wayne K. Durill showed in his study of Anson County, these laws essentially meant that local elites could "arrest, try, convict, and imprison or fine any person…on any charge."[89] In one representative case, Union County Conservatives threatened to arrest John Medlin on murder charges in May 1866. During the winter of 1862, Union County militia officers attempted to arrest Medlin and three others for not answering the call for conscription. When the militia approached their cabin in the middle of the night, Medlin and his friends opened fire, killing one and wounding another. They fled for east Tennessee, but patrolling Home Guard units captured them and sent them to a Richmond prison in November 1864. Medlin escaped his imprisonment two more times, including from his home county's local jail, where he engaged in more fire fights with capture parties. According to Medlin, "I then staid [sic] at home undisturbed until a short time befour [sic] the Superior Court," when his secessionist neighbors began threatening his arrest.[90]

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[88] Wiley Abner Perry and Sophia Gilliam to Governor Holden, August 31, 1865; William Holden to Thomas B. Long, September 18, 1865, William W. Holden, Governors Papers, SANC.

[89] Wayne K. Durill, "Political Legitimacy and Local Courts: 'Politicks at Such a Rage' in a Southern Community during Reconstruction," *The Journal of Southern History* 3 (Aug. 2004): 58.

[90] "Miscellaneous Items," Raleigh *Semi-Weekly Standard,* November 15, 1864, 3; John Medlin to Captain H.M. Lazelle, May 16, 1866, Jonathan Worth, Governors Papers, SANC.

The weaponization of local courts continued unabated through 1867, as Governor Jonathan Worth refused to acknowledge that Conservatives had set up the court system to unfairly prosecute their adversaries.[91] Isaac Maness of Moore County received a one-year prison sentence for stealing a horse from his neighbor Daniel Lambert during the war. Despite having moved his family to South Carolina, local Conservatives were bent on punishing Maness, likely due to his desertion from the rebel Twenty-Sixth North Carolina.[92] Similarly, Chatham County Conservatives levied a two-year prison sentence against Ruffin Hatch, a seventeen-year-old freedmen, for stealing $40 to buy clothes and farm tools. Freedmen like Hatch suffered from court abuse at a three-to-one ratio by 1867, usually with harsher sentences. General Edward R.S. Canby, military overseer of the Carolinas, informed Jonathan Worth that three of every four civil suits were against Unionists.[93] Conservatives prosecuted so many Unionists and anti-Confederates in Wake County that local magistrates scheduled a special session of their Superior Court's fall term.[94]

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[91] Bradley, *Bluecoats & Tar Heels,* 118; North Carolina's Amnesty Act essentially pardoned all actions taken under the Confederate government, effectively allowing the state's courts to designate who was a citizen during the war and what rights they had. This act created a loophole in which Unionists could be prosecuted for alleged crimes while Confederates were left unpunished. See: David C. Williard, "Criminal Amnesty, State Courts, and the Reach of Reconstruction," *The Journal of Southern History* 1 (Feb. 2019): 109, 118.

[92] Petitioners to Governor Worth, September 21, 1867, Jonathan Worth, Governors Papers, SANC. Maness and his family is listed in the 1870 census as living in Moore County, indicating that these charges went through, forcing him to return to North Carolina. See: *1870 U.S. Census,* Population Schedule, Moore co., N.C. (Washington D.C.: National Archives), accessed at https://www.ancestry.com.

[93] Chatham Co. Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions to Governor Worth, July 1, 1867, Jonathan Worth, Governors Papers, SANC; Bradley, *Bluecoats & Tar Heels,* 168.

[94] J.N. Bunting to Governor Worth, November 1867, Jonathan Worth, Governors Papers, SANC.

Since Governor Worth remained complicit with vengeful Conservatives, military officials attempted to halt court prosecutions through general orders. General Order 89, for example, reversed the land-ownership requirement of jury qualification, allowing any taxpayer to serve. Worth and his Conservative following hated these provisions, feeling that the common citizen should not have policing power.[95] In Anson County, the Superior Court refused to follow these orders, leading military officials to urge Worth to suspend court in the county.[96] Conservatives utilized the courts effectively until election cycles in 1868 in which Republican victories allowed them to appoint their own magistrates.[97] These elections did not, however, signal a resurgence of straight-sect Unionist support, but was rather a product of leading Conservatives urging their electorate to treat the elections as illegitimate and refuse to vote.[98]

The repressive tactics of piedmont Conservatives only worsened as freedmen began acting politically with the help of white Unionists. Conservatives, and even some Unionists, expected the freed population to remain as close to their wartime status as possible. African Americans, however, worked tirelessly to capitalize on their newfound freedom, pushing many Unionists into the Conservative camp. As historian Mark Bradley aptly noted in his study of military occupation in the state, "even the most loyal southern whites hated blacks,"

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[95] Bradley, *Bluecoats & Tar Heels,* 161.

[96] R. Tyler Bennett to Governor Worth, December 21, 1867, Jonathan Worth, Governors Papers, SANC.

[97] Durill, "Political Legitimacy and Local Courts," 582.

[98] Bradley, *Bluecoats & Tar Heels,* 172-173.

and the prospects of politically active blacks exacerbated political unrest.[99] Governor Worth highlighted these expectations in an address to a freedmen's convention in Raleigh in 1866. In early October, members of the African Methodist Church invited the governor to their convention as "one of our warmest friends."[100] Curiously, Worth did not expect to speak at the convention, but after the meeting's organizers urged him, delivered a brief address. "Let me advise you not to meddle in governmental affairs," he warned. Worth promised to protect the rights of freedmen, so long as they "avoid politics. Practice industry, virtue, and cultivate the kind feeling which now exists between the races." Only then, he contended, could they elevate their condition.[101]

Piedmont blacks did not heed Worth's advice, organizing and holding meetings quite frequently. By 1867, white Unionists in the region realized the political expediency in cooperating with these large bodies of freedmen and began inviting local black leaders to their assemblies.[102] This political mobilization did not sit well with local Conservatives and they took to extralegal measures to curb it. When blacks in Holly Springs, Wake County, assembled for a meeting in April, the conservative Raleigh *Sentinel* mocked the meeting's low turnout and referred to them as the "God-Cursed Sons of Ham." The meeting's attendance would have been much larger, however, if it had not been for local landowners

[99] Bradley, *Bluecoats & Tar Heels,* 87.

[100] James Harris to Governor Worth, October 2, 1866, Jonathan Worth, Governors Papers, SANC.

[101] "The Colored Educational Convention," Raleigh *Weekly Sentinel*, October 8, 1866, 3.

[102] "Meetings of the Colored People," Raleigh *Weekly Standard,* March 27, 1867, 3.

threatening their black employees with termination.[103] Two weeks later, the *Sentinel* editor stated that blacks "have yet to be taught the lesson of self-reliance and its importance…without this, they never can make well qualified voters." They continued by approvingly quoting the Richmond *Examiner* in saying that the continued political activity of blacks "must result in a war of races, when…respectable whites will have to enter into societies, pledging themselves to employ no colored man for any purpose." Holden rightly summarized these statements as "a palpable threat, that if the colored man does not yield up his freedom and vote for 'old massa,' he is to be starved out."[104]

Despite these threats, piedmont freedmen and some white Unionists continued to cooperate. In response, Conservatives took to organized violence as a form of political suppression. Early in 1867, rumors circulated that piedmont Conservatives began forming militant groups and secret societies designed to target property-holding blacks and white Unionists. In January, Raleigh newspapers reported "a secret organization in Union County" that appeared "revolutionary in its character." Newspapers alleged that the organization consisted of former rebels and referred to it as the wartime organization known as the Knights of the Golden Circle, calling it a "nucleus and rallying point for traitors."[105] Additionally, militant Conservatives known as Regulators had reportedly arrived in Wake County in March. The group originated on the coast soon after the war and served to

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[103] "The Holly Springs Meeting," Raleigh *Daily Standard,* April 11, 1867, 2.

[104] Richmond *Examiner* quoted in, "The End," Raleigh *Daily Sentinel,* April 25, 1867, 2; William Holden in, no title, Raleigh *Weekly Standard,* May 1, 1867, 3.

[105] "North Carolina: Secret Disloyal Organizations – Depredations of 'Regulators,'" Raleigh *Daily Standard,* January 24, 1867, 2; "The Colored People," Raleigh *Daily Standard,* January 26, 1867, 2.

violently oppress free blacks that held property. When they arrived in Wake County, they quickly began stealing horses and mules from local blacks and destroyed the mill of the alleged Unionist Edward Haswell.[106]

Violence became the preferred tactic of piedmont Conservatives in suppressing their neighbors. One persecuted Unionist in Anson County complained to newspapers in Raleigh, "there should be some protection furnished to loyal men. I am compelled to go night and day armed for self-defence."[107] Similarly, Moore County Unionists and freedmen assembled in March 1867 for a "Union meeting," when "a party of secessionists" began firing guns and shouting threats from the forest, bringing an abrupt end to their gathering. "We can't stand this much longer," one local complained, warning that "the secessionists of Moore aim to overpower the loyal men."[108] Raleigh newspapers reported a similar occurrence in Union County, in which a "Rebel Sheriff" broke up a Unionist meeting. According to reports, Eli H. Hinson and other white Unionists were "drilling" with the freedmen, frightening locals. The sheriff arrested Hinson and several other white Unionists, though they had committed no crime. The Raleigh *Standard* complained that "the Rebel presses here ring with the charge that Mr. Hinson was a 'deserter' from the Confederate army," asking, "is he to be 'whistled down the wind' for that?"[109]

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[106] "Outrage by 'The Regulators,'" Raleigh *Daily Standard,* May 23, 1867, 2.

[107] March 24, 1867 letter quoted in, "Extracts," Raleigh *Daily Standard,* April 9, 1867, 2.

[108] "Meetings of Colored People: Meeting in Moore County," Raleigh *Daily Standard,* May 7, 1867, 2.

[109] "Republican Meeting at Grassy Creek," Raleigh *Weekly Standard,* October 2, 1867, 1; "The Grassy Creek Difficulty," Raleigh *Daily Standard,* October 12, 1867; Eli H. Hinson deserted the Confederate Forty-Eighth N.C. and fled to Union lines at Petersburg, Virginia. There he took the "rebel deserters' oath" of allegiance to the United States Government on

The end of 1867 and early 1868 proved to be a pivotal moment for the piedmont's Unionists. General Canby called for elections to be held in late November to decide if the state wanted to hold a constitutional convention as well as choose delegates for it. He hoped that by calling a convention and redrawing their state's constitution to meet federal requirements, North Carolina would be free from military Reconstruction and reenter the Union. Worth and other leading Conservatives, however, encouraged their constituents to boycott the elections in resistance. The no-vote strategy they suggested made for a lopsided election in which 93,006 voted for the convention with 107 of 120 delegates being Republicans. With such a large majority, Republicans drafted a new state constitution that revised the penal system, established public education, and made several county offices an electable enterprise. Historian Mark Bradley called the new constitution one that "afforded citizens a greater voice in their government and promised to benefit the people as never before."[110]

The convention decided to hold an election in March for voters to decide on passing or rejecting the amended constitution, as well as vote for members of the state's legislature. Suspecting foul play at the polls, Canby warned North Carolinians that election violence would be dealt with harshly, and placed a policing force in each voting district to keep the peace. His suspicion came from several reports of election fraud, like in Anson County where tickets with Republican candidates mysteriously arrived after the convention election already took place. Additionally, in the beginning of 1868, rumors had been spread about the

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September 22, 1864. See: Eli H. Hinson, Private, Co. I, 48th North Carolina Infantry, Compiled Service Records.

[110] "Result of the Election," Wilmington *Journal*, January 17, 1868, 4; Bradley, *Bluecoats & Tar Heels,* 170-173, 181.

existence of the Ku Klux Klan and many Unionists feared they would intimidate voters. Surprisingly, the elections passed smoothly and with only a few isolated instances of election violence. Owing to the increased protection for voters and no-vote strategy of the Conservatives, Republicans swept the elections, winning all state offices and a large majority in the General Assembly.[111]

Republican victories throughout the state continued to divide piedmont residents and marked the beginning of the region's Conservatives using systematic violence to regain control over local politics. The first signs of unrest came after William Holden defeated Thomas Ashe for governor, replacing Jonathan Worth. General Canby informed Worth of Holden's election, a result that Worth blamed on fraud. Worth relinquished his office under the cries of military duress and Holden began making his own appointments, replacing Raleigh's mayor and town commissioners.[112] The Conservative Mayor William Haywood ordered a squad of police to surround city hall to prevent Holden's appointments from taking office, leading to violent confrontations between Republicans and Conservatives. As men began hurling verbal abuses at one another, the local police reacted violently. They clubbed a Holden appointee over the head and shot at a black bystander despite the sheriff attempting to restrain them. As the city bell rang in an attempt to disperse the crowd, the Sixth U.S. Infantry arrived to quell the violence and let Holden's men take office.[113]

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[111] Bradley, *Bluecoats & Tar Heels,* 181-184; "Republican State Convention," Raleigh *Weekly Standard*, February 19, 1868, 3; "The Election in North Carolina," Raleigh *Daily Standard,* May 5, 1868, 2.

[112] Bradley, *Bluecoats & Tar Heels,* 190-191.

[113] "The Riot," Raleigh *Daily Standard,* July 15, 1868, 3.

Anson County Conservatives also reacted intensely to the Republican victories of 1868. In August, a group of disgruntled magistrates resigned in protest, refusing to serve under "the man who writes himself Governor."[114] Similarly local planters pledged themselves to "always give [employment] preference to those who vote with us," and terminate any that voted Republican.[115] Deviating from this standard brought violent consequences. In September in the White's Store neighborhood, Conservatives held a political meeting in which they invited Samuel Redfern, a black man, and Samuel Jackson, a white Unionist, to speak. When they began speaking in favor of Republican principles, "several rebels set upon and beat" them severely. Concerned Unionists warned Raleigh newspapers that in Anson, "the Democratic party…are exceedingly virulent and the poor colored people seem to have no help or redress."[116] In the same month, prominent white Unionist and state legislator Dixon Ingram addressed a crowd at Wadesboro. During his speech, a man in the crowd drew his revolver and "said that he had a good mind to blow seven balls through my body" because "I was and am yet a friend to the government."[117]

The reactionary actions of piedmont Conservatives stemmed directly from Republican gains in 1868, with the new state constitution being the most offensive development. The inclusion of taxpayers as eligible jury members and local office holders destroyed the antebellum tradition of deference to landowning elites. County courts and other

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[114] "North Carolina in a Nutshell," Wilmington *Morning Star,* August 1, 1868, 2.

[115] Wadesboro *Argus* quoted in Durill, "Political Legitimacy and Local Courts," 590-591.

[116] "Anson County," Raleigh *Weekly Standard,* September 9, 1868, 3.

[117] Dixon Ingram to President Johnson, September 13, 1868 quoted in *The Papers of Andrew Johnson: September 1868-April 1869,* ed., Paul H. Bergeron (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 53-54.

political entities gave elites significant policing and legislating power that seemed to vanish with the new constitution. Conservatives reacted to these rapid changes by forming Ku Klux Klan dens, chiefly consisting of elites acting in favor of the local Democratic Party.[118] In Moore and Chatham counties, Klan violence erupted from 1868 to 1870. Serving as a militant arm of the Democratic Party, piedmont Klansmen did not act randomly or confine themselves to localized pockets but rather, as historian Bradley D. Proctor has shown, launched "a premeditated, coordinated counterinsurgency" toward biracial Republican groups.[119]

Chatham and Moore counties were prime targets for Klan operations. During the war, residents of Chatham and Moore opposed the Confederacy more than in most piedmont counties. In 1863, Governor Vance remarked that Moore "certainly harbors more deserters than any other [county] in the state."[120] Similarly Chatham and Moore's religious roots made many citizens more pacifist and in some cases abolitionist. Pittsboro resident and preacher Allen Ellis, for example, became a target of Confederate persecution for spreading abolitionist and anti-war views to his large congregation.[121] During Reconstruction, these counties continued to stand apart from other piedmont communities in that they often voted Republican, despite "desperate efforts made by the Rebel leaders, and the large white

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[118] Durill, "Political Legitimacy and Local Courts," 586.

[119] Bradley D. Proctor, "'The K.K. Alphabet:' Secret Communication and Coordination of the Reconstruction-Era Ku Klux Klan in the Carolinas," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 3 (Aug. 2018): 478.

[120] Richard Street to Governor Vance, April 10, 1863, Zebulon B. Vance, Governors Papers, SANC.

[121] Deposition of Allan Ellis, Questions as to Loyalty, Claim of Allen Ellis, Chatham County, N.C., Approved Claims, SCC.

majority" in both counties.[122] Additionally, both counties experienced an increase in their black populations between 1860 and 1870 while many piedmont counties saw a decline.[123] For Conservatives, these counties posed too much of a threat to Confederate hegemony.

Reports of the Chatham County Klan reached Raleigh in October 1868. A correspondent for the Raleigh *Standard* reported that "the Ku Klux have inaugurated a reign of terror" with their chief purpose "to terrify Republicans in order to prevent the Republican party from gaining strength."[124] Republicans also meant Unionists. Elizabeth Mason of Chatham County recalled, "I lived in a right-Union neighborhood" during the war. Mason fed Confederate deserters and even expressed a willingness to relinquish her family's slaves if it meant ending the fighting. When it did finally end, Mason allowed her former servants to live on her land peacefully. For her known disloyalty, the Ku Klux Klan visited her home frequently, circling her yard and the homes of her black tenants. In one instance, the Klan dragged a black tenant from inside his house, "a servant she raised and thought a good deal of," and whipped him, sending Mason into a fury.[125]

As Klan violence worsened through the end of 1869, Governor Holden threatened Chatham County with martial law. In November, he dispatched Colonel Thomas B. Long

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[122] "Chatham has done Gloriously!" and "Glorious News from the Seventh Congressional District!" Raleigh *Weekly Standard*, April 29, 1868, 3.

[123] *1860 U.S. Census,* Population Schedule, Chatham, Moore co. N.C., and *1870 U.S. Census,* Population Schedule, Chatham, Moore co. N.C. (Washington D.C.: National Archives), accessed at https://www.census.gov.

[124] No title, Raleigh *Weekly Standard,* October 6, 1869, 2.

[125] Deposition of Elizabeth Mason, Questions as to Loyalty and Witness Testimony of William A. Markham, Claim of Elizabeth Mason, Chatham County, N.C., Approved Claims, SCC.

with the task of investigating reports of violence in the region.[126] Over the next year, Long and Chatham residents added to the pile of reported atrocities conducted by the Klan. They aided in tax evasion, released sympathetic white prisoners from the county jail, and hanged and whipped black residents regardless of age, gender, or occupation. In one instance, they clubbed a black woman to death for filing a report to local magistrates because a white man stole her chickpeas. They even forced a black preacher to burn the church that he and others had built on his own land.[127] As the Ku Klux Klan seemingly overwhelmed the state, piedmont Republicans put immense pressure on Governor Holden and the Federal government to act. Holden's own *Standard* declared that "the condition of affairs" in Chatham "is such that it can no longer be permitted, for it is a burning disgrace to the State and to the nation."[128]

In Moore County, the Klan took to extreme violence and gained statewide notoriety. In the winter of 1869 at about midnight, over a dozen Klansmen broke into the home of the freedman Daniel Blue. They sought revenge on him for allegedly testifying against fellow Klansmen in an arson case. After busting down the door, they encountered Blue's pregnant wife and immediately opened fire, killing her instantly. After firing a round through Blue's chest, they shot and killed four of his children and proceeded to stomp a fifth child to death.

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[126] Bradley, *Bluecoats & Tar Heels,* 211; "Gov. Holden – the Disturbances in Orange and Chatham Counties – his Wish and his Efforts for Peace," Raleigh *Weekly Standard,* November 3, 1869, 2.

[127] "Kuklux Outrages," Raleigh *Weekly Standard,* October 5, 1870, 1.

[128] "No More Terrorizing," Raleigh *Weekly Standard,* November 10, 1869, 2.

Blue escaped with wounds, but helplessly watched as they set the home on fire with the bodies of his family left inside.[129]

News of the Blue family slaying shocked the region but later developments seemed more worrisome. A Moore County resident, Daniel A. Graham, joined the Klan in 1868 but eventually defected and served as an informant to Federal officials. Graham outed several leaders and members of his den, including a clerk of the superior court and sheriff that refrained from prosecuting the murderers of Daniel Blue's family, despite having himself conspired in that incident. His testimony revealed that Moore County had nine "councils" that were "stronger than the Republicans." He described their many crimes that included murder, rape, arson, and theft, primarily towards blacks but not excluding whites. Graham recounted two instances in which he and fellow Klansmen shaved the horses of white Republican Henry Kumbret as a mark of shame and burned the home of another, Jacob Starling. To ostracize the men for their political sentiments, they branded them five times with the initials "U.L.," meaning "Union League." When asked about the purpose of the Klan, Graham answered: "to overthrow the government of the U.S. by false swearing, burning, shooting and all other manners if necessary; and to follow the trail of the blood of the scalawag, and rattle his dry bones." To begin the process, Graham revealed that the Moore County Klan had been planning on plotting an assassination attempt on Governor William Holden with the assistance of other councils.[130]

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[129] Bradley, *Bluecoats & Tar Heels,* 207, "Kuklux Outrages," Raleigh *Weekly Standard,* October 5, 1870, 1; "The Kuklux Organization – Its Purposes and its Numerous Deeds of Violence – Additional Testimony from Various Sources," Raleigh *Weekly Standard,* June 1, 1870, 2.

[130] "The Kuklux Organization – Its Purposes and its Numerous Deeds of Violence – Additional Testimony from Various Sources," Raleigh *Weekly Standard,* June 1, 1870, 2.

Because of Graham's testimony, it became clear that "the operations of the [Klan] councils are not confined to particular localities," but were spread throughout the piedmont.[131] In May 1870, Daniel Graham and the Ku Klux Klan again sparked outrage throughout the state and put immense pressure on Holden and other legislators to take action. Operating with councils outside of Moore County, Graham and his men arrived on the plantation of the McLeod family in Cumberland. Newspapers described the family as having "liberal and moderate sentiments" and as being one of the more respectable families in the region. The Klansmen viciously murdered the entire family and robbed their home of all valuables before leaving.[132] The McLeod family massacre and the many brutalities before it shocked the state. One outraged resident of Robeson County wrote a scathing letter to Conservatives in the Raleigh *Standard*, accusing them of tainting the good citizens of the region: "The whites of Moore were poor, but honest men, and would have remained honest, had not your Klan and its leaders seduced them from their quiet firesides and the cultivation of their little farms." The writer even had choice words for Daniel Graham saying, "you see he is a soldier of the lost cause…It is the business of the Klan to murder men, women and children for nothing but opinion, and why not when money is to be made at it?"[133]

Less than two weeks after the McLeod tragedy, Governor Holden issued a proclamation against the Klan, calling for civil and military authorities to assist in capturing

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[131] "The Kuklux Organization – Its Purposes and its Numerous Deeds of Violence – Additional Testimony from Various Sources," Raleigh *Weekly Standard,* June 1, 1870, 2.

[132] "The Cumberland Outrage – Murder of the McLeod Family," Wilmington *Journal,* June 3, 1870, 2.

[133] "For the Standard, Letter from Robeson County," Raleigh *Daily Standard,* June 8, 1870, 2.

the men responsible for the countless murders that made headlines for almost two years.[134] As statewide elections approached, Holden sent Major Henry M. Miller to Carthage in Moore County to keep order, as the Klan threatened that "no free election" would take place there.[135] The only successful military operation against the Klan, however, took place in Chatham County. In July 1870, General Canby sent the Eighth U.S. Infantry to apprehend a group of Klansmen that shot and killed freedman Wyatt Prince. Prince had not committed any offense; they only killed him to serve as a warning to any blacks that might vote in coming elections. The military captured the guilty parties in just two days. On July 10, the regiment returned to Raleigh with nine suspects in custody, some of them Wake County natives. The men put up no resistance to the troops, signaling to government authorities that only the military had the power to intimidate the Klan.[136]

Holden's use of military authority to seek out the Ku Klux Klan proved to be too little too late. The Klan's intimidation tactics had worked. In 1870, Republican voter turnout decreased by 13,000 in state elections. This allowed the Conservatives to win six of seven congressional seats and outnumber Republicans two to one in the legislature.[137] With political power back in their hands, Conservative legislators voted to impeach Governor Holden for the alleged illegality in which he sought out Klansmen. Frederick W. Strudwick, a piedmont Klan leader, introduced the impeachment articles. Dominating North Carolina's

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[134] "A Proclamation, By His Excellency, the Governor of North Carolina," Raleigh *Daily Standard,* June 11, 1870, 3.

[135] "Movement of Troops," Raleigh *Weekly Standard,* August 3, 1870, 3.

[136] "More Outrages – More Blood, Raleigh *Weekly Standard,* July 13, 1870, 2; Bradley, *Bluecoats & Tar Heels,* 224-225.

[137] Bradley, *Bluecoats & Tar Heels,* 229.

legislature, Conservatives successfully removed Holden from office, making him the first governor in American history to be removed from office by impeachment. For North Carolina's Conservatives, they had redeemed their state. Though a Republican governor, Tod R. Caldwell, replaced Holden, he was essentially handcuffed to the Conservative dominated congress. From 1870 until the official end of Reconstruction, North Carolina Conservatives retained their grasp on the state's legislature, and their power only grew as the years progressed.[138]

In the years leading to the Civil War, many piedmont residents expressed an aversion to secession and disunion. As the war progressed, anti-Confederate sentiments grew as underprivileged citizens shouldered the heaviest burdens and the prospects of southern defeat grew increasingly likely. The widespread resistance that took place throughout the piedmont suggested that Unionists dominated the region and that a strong Republican coalition might dictate the postwar years and reshape North Carolina's society. Race, however, united white piedmont residents against Reconstruction and the politics of straight-sect Unionism. To them, resisting the Confederacy had nothing to do with black suffrage or black political equality. When it appeared the Federal government would use military occupation as the means of issuing and protecting these rights, many white citizens in the piedmont rejected Reconstruction and this "new" Union. As the minority group of straight-sect white Unionists allied themselves with freedmen to create a biracial Republican coalition, bitterness spread and many previously anti-Confederate citizens fell into the Conservative mold. Through systematic violence and legal persecution, piedmont Conservatives crippled the political

[138] Bradley, *Bluecoats & Tar Heels,* 233-234, 259-261.

power of Unionists and Republicans, ultimately bringing the antebellum and wartime elite back in power.

III

"It Cost something to be Loyle here:"
Military Occupation and the Politics of Race on the Coast

In August 1863, a wounded Confederate soldier wrote from Union-occupied Beaufort, North Carolina, the seat of Carteret County, near the southern tip of the Outer Banks: "I was a Union man until the Yankees got this part of the country. Now, I am a rebel at heart and wish to God I was able to walk and go out and join the army and do my best to kill all the Yankees, negroes and Buffaloes [a derisive term for natives who adhered to the Union cause] I could."[1] This sentiment diverged significantly from Carteret County's initial view of the country's growing sectional conflict. On December 15, 1860, just five days before South Carolina seceded from the Union, Carteret citizens assembled to discuss the prospects of war. At the meeting, they offered several resolutions on the subject of secession, emphasizing "moderation, conciliation and compromise."[2] This "watch-and-wait" temperament changed drastically upon the news that Confederates fired on Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861. This time, Carteret citizens assembled under the banner of "Southern Rights," endorsing secession and voicing solidarity with their fellow southern states.

However, as Federal forces overtook Carteret, capturing Beaufort on March 25, 1862, their conditional loyalties reemerged. The demands of war proved too harsh for these coastal residents and they embraced their occupiers with the hope that they would restore peace and tranquility within their community. As a more liberal Federal policy unfolded, loyalties shifted once more, confirming the region's Confederate allegiance. In his August 1863 letter,

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[1] "Curious Letter from Within the Yankee Lines," Raleigh *Weekly State Journal,* August 19, 1863.

[2] "Public Meeting in Beaufort," Raleigh *Semi-Weekly Standard,* December 15, 1860.

the disgruntled former Unionist cited several reasons for his change of heart. He complained that many in his community had been "bought" by "Black Republican[s]," mainly the "Buffaloes" that "can not read, write or spell." To him, "any side will suit the poor, ignorant fools if they can only get brass buttons to put on their jackets."[3] This fluctuation in political loyalties characterized much of North Carolina's coast, as the Civil War brought military occupation, the emancipation of slaves, and a fundamental change in the state's political and social structure.

North Carolina's coast revealed varying degrees of political loyalty during the Civil War, owing to the region's geographic and economic diversity. The shoreline counties of the state operated chiefly as fishing societies. In Carteret County, for example, 62 percent of working-aged men made their living on the water.[4] With no significant reliance on plantation agriculture, Carteret had a relatively low slave population of 1,969, putting the county at the bottom twenty-eighth percentile of slave ownership in the state.[5] Commercially separated from North Carolina's interior and maintaining a lower reliance on slavery, Carteret residents initially expressed a more moderate tone toward secession and war, despite eventually falling into the Confederate fold.[6]

West of North Carolina's shorelines resided counties in the intracoastal region. These counties are situated on the large sounds and rivers leading to the Atlantic, such as the

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[3] "Curious Letter," Raleigh *Weekly State Journal,* August 19, 1863.

[4] Judkin Browning, *Shifting Loyalties: The Union Occupation of Eastern North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 11.

[5] *1860 U.S. Census,* Population Schedule, Carteret co. N.C. (Washington D.C.: National Archives), accessed at https://www.census.gov.

[6] Browning, *Shifting Loyalties,* 9, 11.

Pamlico Sound in Beaufort County or the Neuse River in Craven County. Being heavily wooded areas, Beaufort and Craven counties relied on a mix of plantation agriculture, lumber exports, and naval stores for their economic well-being. These two counties had higher slave populations than Carteret, being in the upper twenty-third percentile of slave ownership in the state, indicating their greater reliance on agriculture. In 1860, Craven County also produced the second most naval stores in the state, while Beaufort County held more turpentine facilities than any other county.[7] Both counties vied for commercial prominence, with Craven County serving as one of the state's bustling hubs of trade and Beaufort County experiencing a stark rise in economic output in the 1830s. With commercial aspirations and a greater reliance on slave labor, Craven and Beaufort counties expressed stronger secessionist inclinations than their neighbors in Carteret.[8]

Further inland, separated from the larger Atlantic waterways, lay the coastal plain region. This region consisted primarily of flatter, more fertile land, with a greater economic dependence on plantation agriculture. Edgecombe County, for example, grew the state's most cotton by a large majority. In 1860, Edgecombe produced over 19,000 bales of cotton, nearly double that of the state's second largest producer, Halifax County. As a cotton-producing

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[7] *1860 U.S. Census,* Population Schedule*,* Beaufort, Craven co., North Carolina; *Agriculture of the United States in 1860,* State of North Carolina, Beaufort, Craven co., (Washington D.C: National Archives), accessed at https://www.census.gov; *Manufactures of the United States in 1860,* State of North Carolina, Beaufort, Craven co. (Washington D.C.: National Archives), accessed at https://www.census.gov; Browning, Shifting Loyalties, 11; Beaufort County had a slave population of 5,879 while Craven County had 6,189.

[8] Browning, *Shifting Loyalties,* 9; Pauline M. Worthy, "The Town Develops," in Washington *and the Pamlico,* ed. Ursula Fogleman Loy and Pauline Marion Worthy (Washington, N.C.: Washington-Beaufort County Bicentennial Commission, 1976), 11, 13; Lindsay C. Warren, "Beaufort County's Contribution to a Notable Era of North Carolina History," in *Washington and the Pamlico,* 20-22.

powerhouse, Edgecombe County had one of the highest slave populations in the state at 10,108. Especially significant, Edgecombe's white population was only 8,430. Between 1850 and 1860, the slave population increased by 2,000 while the white population decreased by 1,500.[9] Politically, Edgecombe's Democratic Party reigned supreme with very few competitors. As secession debates engrossed the country, Edgecombe County fervently clung to their institution of slavery and tirelessly advocated for the Confederate cause.[10]

Despite geographic and economic differences, each of these four coastal counties became firmly entrenched in their Confederate sentiments due to their wartime experiences. For most of the war, Beaufort, Carteret, and Craven counties experienced Federal military occupation. During this time, local residents saw firsthand the sweeping changes that the Civil War would eventually bring to the South. For these residents, Reconstruction did not begin after Lee's surrender, but the moment Union forces arrived in 1862. Union military personnel helped facilitate the emancipation of slaves, granting them expansive new rights and privileges. From the local white populace's perspective, the Union military brought about these changes at their expense, favoring Unionists and freedmen over loyal white southerners. Though unoccupied by a military force, Edgecombe residents anxiously watched events in neighboring counties, confirming their deepest fears that led them to embrace secession from the beginning of the war. When the fighting formally ended, each of these counties fought to undo and avenge the changes and hardships brought on by Union victory.

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[9] *Agriculture of the United States in 1860,* State of North Carolina, Edgecombe co; *1860 U.S. Census,* Population Schedule, Edgecombe co., North Carolina.

[10] J. Kelly Turner & Jno. L. Bridgers, Jr., *History of Edgecombe County, North Carolina* (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton Printing Co., 1920), 154-155, 161.

On December 20, 1860, South Carolina declared their separation from the United States, pressuring their neighboring state, North Carolina, to confront the question. From the earliest months of 1861, division along the coast became evident. In Beaufort County, local leaders assembled to "deplore the election of a sectional President," which they saw as "calculated to disturb the harmony which ought to exist between the people." Despite their indignation toward the election of Abraham Lincoln, the meeting leaders clarified, "we are sincerely attached to the Union, and that we intend to stand by it until the most obtuse intellect can see that our liberties and property are menaced."[11] As weeks passed and several other states seceded, however, Beaufort County residents acted restlessly, at one point crowding the streets of Washington, the county seat, shouting for the Southern cause. Local leader and eventual Confederate captain, Thomas Sparrow, tried to quell the anxiety in his neighborhood by assembling citizens at the local courthouse to preach moderation and peace.[12]

In neighboring Craven County, New Bern leaders expressed a cautious and more aggressive Unionism. During a February meeting, leading speakers denounced the northern states, yet called secession an irresponsible move. Although preaching moderation and caution, local Unionist J.W. Bryan declared that "these northern States must leave the Union," and that the South had a "duty to hold on to the government, continuing to be the United States of America." New Bern's local newspaper, the *Daily Progress*, condemned the meeting for preaching any form of Unionism, claiming that their efforts only served to give

[11] "Union Meeting in Beaufort County," Raleigh *Semi-Weekly Standard,* January 1, 1861, 2.

[12] Annie Blackwell Sparrow, "Recollections of the Civil War," in *Washington and the Pamlico,* 52-53.

"aid and comfort to the Black Republicans."[13] Local sentiment surrounding the issue continued to appear divided, as New Bern leaders restocked their armory with 1,600 rifles and began forming companies of men during the same period.[14] Carteret County residents experienced similar conflicts over the secession question. Within the same week in February, locals assembled in two meetings, one for secession and one for the Union. While leading Unionists continued to canvass for national reconciliation, the secessionist parties declared that "the time to make speeches" had ended.[15]

Unlike its divided coastal neighbors, Edgecombe County citizens acted with unanimity on the secession question. As early as January, Rocky Mount residents began forming militia companies, drilling, and designing a secession flag of their own. In a celebration of South Carolina's secession, local militia soldiers fired fifteen guns in solidarity with their cause. One resident confidently declared, "in this county…no canvassing will be necessary, as the people are unanimous for secession." Regarding Unionist sentiment in North Carolina, Edgecombe's staunch secessionists denounced them as hindering the progress of the state. Fortunately for their party, "you don't find those creatures (submissionists) in the Cotton County."[16]

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[13] "Large and Enthusiastic Union Meeting in Craven," Raleigh *Semi-Weekly Standard,* March 2, 1861, 3.

[14] Browning, *Shifting Loyalties,* 23.

[15] "A Public Meeting in Carteret, Raleigh *Semi-Weekly Standard,* February 23, 1861, 2; States Rights Meeting," New Bern *Weekly Progress,* February 26, 1861, 2.

[16] "The Feeling in Edgecombe, Tarboro *Southerner,* January 26, 1861, 2; "From the Goldsboro Rough Notes," Tarboro *Southerner,* February 2, 1861, 1; "Cor. of the Newbern Progress," Tarboro *Southerner,* February 23, 1861, 2; "Very True," Tarboro *Southerner,* March 16, 1861, 2.

North Carolinians voted in late February on whether or not to hold a secession convention, exposing more incongruities. Beaufort County voted against a convention while Craven, Carteret, and Edgecombe endorsed one. In Edgecombe, only seventeen people voted against a convention compared to 1,588 in favor. Craven County residents acted more decidedly, giving a 400 vote majority for the convention. Carteret had the closest contest, with the convention vote only passing by a majority of four votes.[17] Only Beaufort and Carteret elected Unionist delegates to the proposed convention, while Edgecombe and Craven favored two secessionist representatives.[18] No convention occurred, as state residents narrowly defeated the measure.

Early signs of political division vanished quickly, however, following the Confederate firing on Fort Sumter and President Lincoln's call for troops three days later. No longer could Unionist sentiment be tolerated on the coast. The previously cautious citizens of Carteret assembled at Morehead City to "assert and maintain that there is now no Union."[19] On the night of the firing on Fort Sumter, New Bern residents crowded the streets in celebration of the prospects that North Carolina might secede. In the midst of this celebration, a group of men suspended an effigy of President Lincoln, burning it in the streets as the editor of New Bern's *Daily Progress* declared, "we can safely say that there is but one party here now."[20] Already militarized, Edgecombe County's Rocky Mount Light Infantry

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[17] "Election Returns," Wilmington *Journal*, March 7, 1861, 2.

[18] "Election Returns," Raleigh *Register,* March 6, 1861, 3.

[19] "Southern Rights Meeting in Carteret," New Bern *Daily Progress,* April 16, 1861, 2.

[20] Browning, *Shifting Loyalties,* 28; "Rejoicing!" New Bern *Daily Progress,* April 16, 1861, 2.

and the Edgecombe Guards hosted a parade, displaying two secessionist flags. One flag had seven stars representing the seceded states, with one additional star being "half out," representing North Carolina's hesitancy. Edgecombe citizens swore that "if this old State does not secede, rest assured…Edgecombe, will secede from the State."[21]

On May 20, 1861, North Carolina officially seceded from the Union and the coast began mobilizing for war.[22] Despite originally urging his community to remain moderate and endorse Unionism, Beaufort County lawyer Thomas Sparrow formed the first company of soldiers in his locality, adopting the name "The Washington Greys," where he served as Captain of the artillery unit. All told, Beaufort County raised five artillery companies and five infantry companies. [23] Seventy percent of fighting-aged males enlisted in Craven, while only 31 percent of eligible males joined in Carteret. In Carteret, most residents acted as hesitant Confederates, only willing to join if they could remain near home. More telling, however, enthusiastic recruits from both counties typically came from wealthier, landowning families. From a sample of 295 men from Carteret, historian Judkin Browning found that 68 percent of enlistees came from landowning households. Similarly, 75 percent of identifiable recruits from Craven came from landowning homes.[24] Browning's findings suggest that Confederate enthusiasm on the coast was reserved for the socially and economically well-off.

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[21] "Firm for Secession, Petersburg *Express,* in Charlotte *Evening Bulletin*, April 16, 1861, 2.

[22] Edgecombe County sent upwards of 1,400 men to the Confederate Army. See, Turner and Bridges, *History of Edgecombe County,* 195.

[23] Charles F. Warren, "The Civil War Era," in *Washington and the Pamlico*, 45-46.

[24] Browning, *Shifting Loyalties,* 37.

While many coastal residents rallied around the Confederate cause, some retained their devotion to the Union. Local Confederates used harsh suppression tactics to quell dissent. Thomas L. Hall of Morehead City refused all local efforts to enlist Confederate troops in Carteret County. In a show of intimidation, the Twenty-Sixth North Carolina Infantry, recently sent to Carteret to reinforce the coastline, drilled in front of his home. Confederate officers threatened to tar and feather him, called him a "whitewashed Yankee," and held him at knife point. Hall still refused to fall in line. As a consequence, the soldiers set fire to his boat and fences before plundering his home for food.[25] James B. Roberts in the nearby town of Newport showed similar resistance. Local Confederates "drafted" Roberts into Confederate service, but he refused to do anything more than patrol bridges within his home county. His lack of devotion to the Confederacy brought severe backlash. During the first call for troops in 1861, secessionists threatened to tie Roberts, his three brothers, and father to a stake to be burned. His reputation among neighbors was so poor that a volunteer in the Ninth New Jersey Infantry recollected, "[I] believe that if he had been caught by the Confederate forces they would have executed him. He was a shining mark."[26]

Unionists that voted or spoke against the Confederacy often became branded and marginalized within their community. James Evington of Beaufort County "was a poor and feeble man and did not feel able" to aid the Union through physical service. Instead, Evington voted as he always had, as "an old line Whig…opposed to secession." In public conversations, he disparaged the war and quickly earned a reputation for disloyalty in his

[25] Deposition of Thomas L. Hall, Claim of Thomas L. Hall, Carteret County, North Carolina, Allowed Claims, SCC.

[26] Deposition of James B. Roberts and Witness Testimony of E. Hubbs, Claim of James B. Roberts, Carteret County, North Carolina, Allowed Claims, SCC.

community. Former Confederate Hiram E. Stelly recalled that he and his comrades, "had conversations frequently upon the loyalty of different subjects in the county of Beaufort to the Confederate Government," and they characterized Evington as a "Buffalo."[27] New Bern resident Henry Covert openly called Southern leaders "the biggest fools in the world." William H. Pearce encouraged Covert "not to speak so freely as he might get into difficulty." Covert refused to stay silent, however, and in the fall of 1861, a mob of citizens detained him and threatened to tar and feather the old Unionist.[28] For making public speeches in White Oak, Carteret County, Confederate soldiers "cursed and abused" Elijah S. Bell, later burning his canoe and stripping his boat of all its sails.[29] Through incessant terror, violence, and marginalization, coastal Confederates worked tirelessly to keep dissent at bay.

By the summer of 1861, the initial enthusiasm following North Carolina's secession began to wane as the war reached the state's shorelines. On August 29, Federal forces captured Hatteras Inlet, allowing them access to the Pamlico and Albemarle sounds, the main waterways reaching North Carolina's interior. With Union ships in sight of coastal residents, Confederate officials tried hastily to defend their communities. Soldiers, slaves, and civilians worked to refortify and resupply local forts and their county borders. Material shortcomings, apathy, and administrative confusion hindered the process, however, spreading a feeling of demoralization throughout the region.[30] A Beaufort newspaper editor lamented in mid-

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[27] Deposition of James Evington and Witness Testimony of Hiram E. Stelly, Claim of James Evington, Beaufort County, North Carolina, Allowed Claims, SCC.

[28] Witness Testimony of William H. Pearce and Deposition of Henry Covert, Claim of Henry Covert, Craven County, North Carolina, Allowed Claims, SCC.

[29] Deposition of Elijah S. Bell, Claim of Elijah S. Bell, Allowed Claims, SCC.

[30] Browning, *Shifting Loyalties,* 41- 44.

September that "nineteen days have elapsed since Hatteras was taken and nothing has been done…to protect and defend Hyde and Beaufort counties and the town of Washington."[31]

Although more removed from the coast than other counties, Edgecombe residents worried that Confederate authorities had not done enough to protect them. Local official Asa Biggs wrote to Governor Henry Clark that their militia "have been badly used…We need a competent General to command the whole and prepare for our defence." Biggs blamed "conflicting authorities" for their defenselessness and worried, "our people cannot have confidence." In October, Colonel Zebulon Vance, of the Twenty-Sixth North Carolina Infantry, wrote from New Bern, "we are in constant doubt here…a day's carelessness might see us surprised and ruined."[32]

Coastal Confederates' worst fears came true in the spring of 1862. Throughout March, Federal forces quickly overwhelmed Confederate defenses. After heavy fighting, New Bern fell on March 14, followed by Beaufort on March 25. As news reached Washington of New Bern's demise, hundreds of the city's residents fled in panic.[33] In Carteret, Craven, and Beaufort counties, most native whites loyal to the Confederacy evacuated, leaving behind Unionists and those who could not afford to leave. On June 10, U.S. Treasury Agent John A. Hedrick arrived in New Bern and wrote to his brother, "the city is pretty much occupied by soldiers and negroes...there seems to have been a general

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[31] "What does it mean?" Washington *Dispatch* in "Traitors at Home," Fayetteville *Weekly Observer,* September 23, 1861, 2.

[32] Asa Biggs to Governor Clark, February 6, 1862, Henry Toole Clark, Governors Papers, State Archives of North Carolina [hereafter cited as SANC]; Zebulon Vance quoted in Browning, *Shifting Loyalties,* 43.

[33] Browning, *Shifting Loyalties,* 56; Warren, "Beaufort County's Contribution to a Notable Era of North Carolina History," in *Washington and the Pamlico,* 24.

stampede of the respectable citizens when our troops entered the city."[34] When he traveled to Beaufort just days later, Hedrick observed, "pretty much all of the citizens are still here…some are Secessionists but the greater number are Union men now."[35]

Because most Confederate citizens fled from their homes, Union troops initially believed that Unionism was strong on the coast. When marching on Washington, Federal forces met no resistance. They marched to the courthouse accompanied by the regimental band, where locals greeted them with a banner flying over the city that read, "The Union and the Constitution." The residents that embraced the Union army felt betrayed by the Confederate government for its lack of protective measures. On the night of the army's arrival, seven of the county's "original secessionists" dined with Union officers on board a gunboat where they enjoyed drinks and toasts. As a result, Union commanders reported to the War Department that Beaufort County hosted very loyal sentiments.[36] This supposed Unionism became especially apparent when Union forces brought trade goods, food, and business. In Craven and Carteret, businesses reopened with "cheerfulness and profit," leading occupying soldiers to believe that local secessionists had "dropped their patriotic allusion to the Confederacy."[37]

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[34] John A. Hedrick to Benjamin S. Hedrick, June 10, 1862 in *Letters from a North Carolina Unionist: John A. Hedrick to Benjamin S. Hedrick, 1862-1865*, ed. Judkin Browning and Michael Thomas Smith (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 2001), 3.

[35] John A. Hedrick to Benjamin S. Hedrick, June 20, 1862 in *Letters from a North Carolina Unionist,* 7.

[36] Warren, "Beaufort County's Contribution to a Notable Era of North Carolina History," in *Washington and the Pamlico,* 24; "Wilmington Journal – Traitors &c.," Raleigh *Semi-Weekly Standard,* May 14, 1862, 3.

[37] William A. Musson quoted in Browning, *Shifting Loyalties,* 64.

The Unionism that Federal troops encountered, however, stemmed from practical rather than ideological motivations. Upon arrival, Union troops often confiscated or repurposed the property of known Confederates. Beaufort residents witnessed local secessionist Josiah Pender's Atlantic Hotel stripped of all its valuable furniture and converted into a hospital. Union officers also occupied his home as a consequence for his disloyalty. Local residents became keenly aware that shifting their allegiances could bring monetary gain and ensure the protection of their property. Clerk of the County Court James Rumley, for example, feigned Unionism when in the company of government officials, but expressed his disdain toward the Federal government in his personal journal. Others remained hesitant to embrace their occupiers. Beaufort hotel owner, Benjamin A. Ensley, refused to take the oath of allegiance to the United States for over a year, fearing that Confederates might seek vengeance on him if they ever returned.[38]

One incident with Washington's mayor in neighboring Beaufort County confirmed Ensley's hesitancy. When Union forces began their journey to Washington, Isaiah Respess urged his constituents not to resist, and he cordially welcomed the army. Supplanted by military governorship, Respess settled for a position as the Superintendent of Police. Respess's actions enraged Confederates outside of Beaufort County. In May, a Confederate raiding party arrested the former mayor, sending him to prison in Richmond to be tried for treason. Respess's son, John, resented the arrest of his father and in a drunken fit, proclaimed that he should join the Union army as an act of revenge. Upon examination, Confederate officials judged the elder Respess to be a loyal adherent to their cause, and released him. Indeed, Respess had refused to take the oath of allegiance, had furnished a $20,000 vessel to

[38] Browning, *Shifting Loyalties,* 66-68.

reinforce Hatteras in 1861, and nine of his nephews had joined the Confederate army. The editor of the Wilmington *Journal*, however, angrily proclaimed that the fact that Respess received a trial showed a "tearful, heartfelt sympathy for traitors," and that the government's refusal to arrest his son for treasonous language was an embarrassment to the South.[39]

In actuality, Confederate officials sympathized with Respess's actions. Prior to the occupation period, Respess leased several slaves to work on fortifications in New Bern. Thinking practically, Respess cozied himself with Union officials so that he might recover the slaves. An observer of the trial also noted that the mayor "besought [Union forces] to spare the town, and not injure the property of its unarmed and unresisting inhabitants," an appeal that worked. His arrest outraged even the most loyal Confederates in North Carolina's government. At a legislative convention in Raleigh, judges George Badger of Wake County and Charles Warren of Washington called Respess's treatment "tyrannical and despotic," and helped procure his release from prison.[40] The dual support given to Isaiah Respess by the Confederate and United States government exposes the very fine line between secessionist and Unionist allegiance in coastal North Carolina.

Military occupation on the coast provided a unique opportunity for the region's more devout Unionists. Previously silenced and alienated within their own communities, ideological Unionists now had the means to exert their influence without fear of immediate

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[39] Joseph B. Hinton, "For the Standard: Correction," Raleigh *Weekly Standard,* May 14, 1862, 2; "Wilmington Journal – Traitors &c.," Raleigh *Semi-Weekly Standard,* May 14, 1862, 3.

[40] Joseph B. Hinton, "For the Standard: Correction," Raleigh *Weekly Standard,* May 14, 1862, 2; "The Convention of North Carolina," Raleigh *Weekly State Journal,* May 7, 1862, 3; Warren, "Beaufort County's Contribution to a Notable Era of North Carolina History," *Washington and the Pamlico,* 26.

retribution from their neighbors. With this newfound sense of security, coastal Unionists aided their cause in a number of ways. Many enlisted in the Union army, served as pilots for naval vessels, or opened the doors to their homes and businesses for their new residents. In the intracoastal Bertie County, John N. Langdale often spoke against secession and the Confederacy. For his treasonous language and refusal to take positions in the Confederate army, Langdale recalled, "I was threatened with injury to my person, family and property." Unable to withstand the constant persecution, Langdale fled his home in 1863 and headed for the Union-occupied town of Beaufort. Despite "being broke up on account of his having to leave his home," he joined the Union army and served in the Second North Carolina regiment until the end of the war.[41]

In New Bern, Unionist residents contributed all the support they could to Union soldiers. Prior to military occupation, Alexander Taylor received threats for telling "a party of gentlemen that if they did not put a stop to the war they would be as poor as I was." With his overbearing secessionist neighbors suppressed by the presence of Union troops, Taylor provided soldiers with any food he could spare.[42] Similarly, Confederate soldiers threatened to imprison Arthur Gaskins for his "buffalo" sentiments and carried his son off as a soldier against his will. After the fall of New Bern, Gaskins showed his appreciation by cutting and

[41] Deposition of John N. Langdale and Witness Testimony of Elikum Swain, Claim of John N. Langdale, Carteret County, North Carolina, Allowed SCC.

[42] Deposition of Alexander Taylor, Claim of Alexander Taylor, Craven County, North Carolina, Barred and Disallowed SCC.

delivering wood to Union encampments. For his loyalty to the government, Union officers allowed him a travel pass to move between the lines as he pleased.[43]

Perhaps the clearest manifestation of Unionism on the coast came through enlistment. In June 1862 and November 1863, the Federal government authorized the raising of two Union regiments consisting of native whites, the First and Second North Carolina Volunteers. Roughly 1,500 men from the coast joined these regiments, many of them coming from Confederate service. Out of sixty-nine Craven volunteers and thirty-three from Carteret, for example, thirty-one fled their posts in the Confederate military to join.[44] The large number of enlistees gave much hope to the Union cause, as New Bern's *Weekly Progress* reported in September 1862, "Men who evaded the rebel draft at the risk of imprisonment and death, and willingly endured privation to preserve themselves from participation in this revolt…now come forward with alacrity to enroll their names as Union volunteers." The paper went on to praise Carteret County resident Thomas Willis for furnishing five of his six sons to the Union army, despite his neighborhood having been "coaxed and threatened" by local Confederates.[45] The 1890 Veterans Schedules provides a glimpse of Union enlistment on the coast. Craven and Beaufort counties boasted significant numbers of Union veterans with 159

[43] Deposition of Arthur Gaskins and Witness Testimony of Redding Wiley, Claim of Arthur Gaskins, Craven County, North Carolina, Barred and Disallowed SCC.

[44] Browning, *Shifting Loyalties,* 72.

[45] "The Union War Meetings in North Carolina," New Bern *Weekly Progress,* September 27, 1862, 3.

listed in Beaufort and 256 in Craven. Carteret County was home to 87 enlistees, while the secessionist-dominated Edgecombe only recorded 29.[46]

The coast's African American residents also seized the many opportunities Union occupation had to offer. One white New Bern resident recalled, "the colored men as a class were all in favor of the Union; every colored man in this section of the state, free born and slave, was in favor of the Union."[47] A slave before the war, Jacob Grimes fled his plantation in Pitt County after his master threatened to hang him and moved to Washington, then to New Bern. There, Grimes helped build forts, breastworks, and served as a guide for Union scouting parties. After the war, Grimes offered an explanation for his sentiments: "I sympathized with the Union Cause always. I believed in the beginning of the war that there was something good coming out of it for me. Freedom!"[48] Similarly, former slave Jacob Cherry and his brother escaped their master's plantation in Brunswick County to live within Federal lines in Washington, where Jacob's brother enlisted in the army. Cherry recalled, "I sympathized with the Union cause as I felt if that cause succeeded that I should be free and that it would be to my benefit."[49]

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[46] *1890 U.S. Census,* Beaufort, Carteret, Craven, Edgecombe Co., N.C., "Special Schedules of the Eleventh Census Enumerating Union Veterans and Widows of Union Veterans of the Civil War" (Washington D.C., National Archives), accessed at https://www.ancestry.com.
[47] Witness Testimony of Hilliard I. Dillahunt, Claim of John S. Manix, Craven County, North Carolina, Allowed SCC.

[48] Deposition of Jacob Grimes, Claim of Jacob Grimes, Craven County, North Carolina, Allowed SCC.

[49] Deposition of Jacob Cherry, Claim of Jacob Cherry, Beaufort County, North Carolina, Allowed SCC.

When the Union military took control of coastal North Carolina, enslaved blacks, like Grimes and Cherry, fled to their lines in large numbers. In Beaufort County, Confederate Major General Leonidas Polk wrote to his wife in 1862, "it is nothing uncommon for dozens of slaves to escape from one man in a day, or for a plantation to be effectually ruined in a few hours."[50] Slaves also headed to Federal lines from neighboring counties. The *Charlotte Democrat* observed in 1862 that "the presence of the Yankees in Washington continues to afford facilities for the escape of large numbers of negroes from all parts of the County, and from Pitt and Martin Counties."[51]

In neighboring Edgecombe County, heavily dependent on slave labor, the proximity of the Union army caused many disturbances to their labor force. With the war drawing men from their homes, W.W. Parker wrote to Governor Zebulon Vance in 1863, "I am the only one of the male children" left on his estate. As such, Parker oversaw his own and his mother's plantations, putting him in charge of over seventy slaves, an enormous responsibility given the slaves desire to escape.[52] From Tarboro, Jesse P. Brown asked the governor to provide additional troops to his community as a laboring force. Brown complained that "the negroes are ofting [sic] going off to Yankees," continuing, "there is no dependence to put in them."[53]

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[50] L.L. Polk to wife, October 31, 1862, Leonidas Polk, L. Polk Denmark Collection, SANC.

[51] "Yankees in Beaufort County, Charlotte *Democrat,* September 9, 1862, 3.

[52] W.W. Parker to Gov. Vance, July 13, 1863, Zebulon Baird Vance, Governors Papers, SANC.

[53] Jesse P. Brown to Gov. Vance, July 25, 1863, Zebulon Baird Vance, Governors Papers, SANC.

Black residents used service in the Union army as a way of asserting their freedom and proving themselves as worthy citizens. Whether providing their labor or actually enlisting, coastal blacks took advantage of the Union army's presence to uplift themselves financially and socially. In the summer of 1862, Washington's *New Era* approvingly wrote, "there are now about 300 contrabands working in the different forts and highways of the city. They form quite an original battalion, marching to and from their work."[54] One of these "contrabands" was Alexander F. Moore. Despite having been born a free man, Beaufort County secessionists apprehended Moore when the war first began, sending him to work on Confederate forts at Beacon Island. When news arrived that Union forces took Washington, Moore escaped the Confederate lines and headed home. There, he conducted business as a brick mason, helping construct defenses and forts around the city. When Confederate forces attempted to besiege the city in 1863, Moore "organized a company for the defense of the town," earning him the respect of Union soldiers in the area.[55]

In North Carolina, nearly 5,000 black residents enlisted in the Union army, seeking a degree of equality with whites fighting for liberty. Most of this number came from the coastal region, as military occupation afforded them the opportunity to do so. This hint of equality, however, sparked the beginning of native white outrage toward their occupiers. As black regiments formed through the spring and summer of 1863, white hostility grew. The prospect of black troops did not sit well with most native whites, even Unionists. John Hedrick wrote to his brother in July, "I don't like to see the negro regiments sent to this State. We have too

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[54] "Locals," Washington *New Era,* July 3, 1862, 4.

[55] Deposition of Alexander Moore, Claim of Alexander F. Moore, Beaufort County, North Carolina, Barred and Disallowed SCC.

many negroes here now. I would much rather see a hundred negroes sent from than one into the State."[56] Watching hundreds of black men crowd enrollment offices, Beaufort's James Rumley declared, "visions of armed and infuriated bands of these black traitors, like imps of darkness, rise before us and darken the future."[57]

Serving the Union army in any capacity shattered antebellum ideas about blacks being loyal servants content under the system of slavery. For serving as a boatman for Union forces and expressing Unionist sentiments, Confederate Captain Josiah Pender shaved former slave Caesar Manson's head and threatened him with tar and feathers. One Beaufort local recalled, "this was done…to disgrace him and cowe him down."[58] Similarly, Marcus Steward of Beaufort escaped slavery and worked under the army's employ, piloting Union soldiers through local waterways. Local secessionists told Steward that "if the Yankees ever got away they would have revenge on him."[59] Indeed, many Confederates did have their revenge. For escaping their Craven County plantation and heading to the Union lines, Confederate forces hanged two unnamed black men in July 1862.[60]

With newfound freedom from bondage, formerly enslaved people sought education to uplift their status. Union officers and northern missionary societies helped facilitate these

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[56] John A. Hedrick to Benjamin S. Hedrick, July 26, 1863 in *Letters from a North Carolina Unionist,* 140.

[57] James Rumley quoted in Browning, *Shifting Loyalties,* 96.

[58] Witness Testimony of David Parker, Claim of Caesar Manson, Carteret County, North Carolina, Barred and Disallowed SCC.

[59] Witness Testimony of Lewis Stevens, Claim of Julia Steward, Carteret County, North Carolina, Allowed SCC.

[60] Barton Myers, *Rebels Against the Confederacy: North Carolina's Unionists* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 56.

social gains, doing much to upset the coast's antebellum order. Northern missionary Vincent Colyer, for example, established two evening schools for blacks in New Bern in April 1862. Between April and June, upwards of eight hundred African Americans attended, showing their fervent desire for education. Union soldiers also helped establish schools wherever they could. Whether in churches, barracks, or abandoned buildings, army officers conducted classes for any former slaves that expressed an eagerness to learn. The arrival of the American Missionary Association (AMA), however, helped enlarge these operations to more than just impromptu schools. The AMA brought far more resources to the coast than before, providing teachers and supplies and purchasing buildings. By March 1864, the AMA helped establish eleven black schools in New Bern and three in Beaufort, allowing for three thousand blacks to enroll in classes.[61]

Black emancipation and education served as a significant alienating force for native white Unionists. North Carolina's Unionists did not view the Civil War as a revolutionary event. In contrast, they supported the Union of 1860, where white supremacy ruled. John Hedrick confirmed this sentiment when writing to his brother in June 1862, "the notion of State Sovereignty is deeply rooted in the minds of the people, and hence they are very much afraid to do any thing contrary to State law."[62] On May 26, 1862, Lincoln appointed New Bern native and Beaufort County resident Edward Stanly as provisional governor of North Carolina. In mid-June, Stanly travelled to recently conquered Washington and gave a speech to a large and enthusiastic crowd, persuading the citizens to support the old Union by arguing

[61] Browning, *Shifting Loyalties,* 77, 100-102, 108-109.

[62] John A. Hedrick to Benjamin S. Hedrick, June 20, 1862 in *Letters from a North Carolina Unionist,* 7.

that the North did not seek emancipation or the social equality of blacks. "What foundation is there," he asked, "for the charge that the Union troops have come to emancipate the slaves?" Stanly promised that "the President's policy is to conciliate you, and have you lay down your arms, - not to interfere with you or your institutions." Stanly reassured his constituents that he would also safeguard southern "institutions."[63]

Governor Stanly kept his word. In the same month he gave his speech in Washington, he ordered Vincent Colyer to close his evening schools. Colyer complained to Lincoln, who overruled Stanly, and the schools soon reopened.[64] Despite his hopeful view of President Lincoln's intentions, the continued emancipation of slaves and efforts to uplift them created doubt for Stanly and many white Unionists. Stanly angrily wrote to Lincoln's Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, "What are the 'constitutional rights and privileges' of the loyal inhabitants of this State? If their property is destroyed or removed before peace is restored, what 'rights and privileges' are they to expect!"[65] Stanly's and many white Unionists' tipping point came in September 1862 when Lincoln announced his preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. To combat this detested policy, Stanly announced an election to be held in January 1863 with the hopes that North Carolina's representation in Congress might exempt them from emancipation. Voting in the election was reserved to those that took the oath of allegiance, and they made their views clear by voting for Jennings Pigott, an anti-emancipation candidate over Charles Henry Foster, a free-labor advocate by a majority of

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[63] "A Grand Gala Day in Washington," Washington *New Era,* June 18, 1862, 2.

[64] Browning, *Shifting Loyalties,* 101.

[65] Edward Stanly to Edwin Stanton, June 12, 1862 quoted in Browning, *Shifting Loyalties,* 80.

437 votes. Not being a native resident of the state however, Congress refused to seat Pigott and the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect in eastern North Carolina. Days later, Governor Stanly resigned in protest, leaving the state in March 1863.[66]

As the occupation years dragged on, Union soldier interactions with civilians soured relations. Despite the Federal government's wish to enact a policy of conciliation rather than one of punishment, encounters with a hostile southern populace, frequent skirmishes, and guerilla violence altered the attitudes of many Union soldiers. Outside of the occupied city of Washington, Beaufort County consisted mainly of rural woodlands where disgruntled rebels often hid out and conducted guerilla raids.[67] Whether sending shots at picket lines or conducting small-scale raids on scouting parties, Confederate guerillas worked to disrupt occupation forces in any way they could. Although citizens of Washington cheerfully greeted their occupiers early in 1862 and military-civil relations remained relatively cordial, these frequent attacks served to frustrate Union soldiers and their conduct subsequently worsened. Meanwhile, positive Federal treatment of African Americans alienated the local white citizens. One Washington resident wrote to a correspondent in Wilmington, proclaiming "a loyal Southerner cannot express his sentiments without danger of being incarcerated." According to the anonymous writer, the Twenty-Fourth Massachusetts Infantry "commenced a scene of wholesale robbery and plunder never equaled on this continent." He continued, "in

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[66] "Complete Election Returns: 2d Congressional District," New Bern *Weekly Progress,* January 10, 1863, 2; Browning, *Shifting Loyalties,* 167.

[67] Union-run newspapers detailed several skirmishes and clashes with occupying forces. See: "A Brilliant Cavalry Skirmish," Washington *New Era,* June 4, 1862, 2; "The Second Attack on our Pickets," Washington *New Era,* June 4, 1862, 2; "The Fight at Tranter's Creek," Washington *New Era,* June 11, 1862, 2; "Locals: Goose Creek Island," Washington *New Era,* June 25, 1862, 4.

every instance of house-breaking the negroes were their informants as well as raiders and abettors." The Washington native explained that many moderate citizens resented the Union and "with clenched hands and closed lips they 'bide their time.'" He averred, "You can have no idea of the fearful passions that agitate them, and their deep-settled purpose of squaring all their accounts, and the settlement will be a *fearful one.*"[68]

News of the Union army's depredations quickly spread throughout the coastal region. In April 1863, former Governor Henry Clark expressed his anxiety when writing to Governor Vance from Edgecombe County, "we are on the frontier of the enemy – an enemy who seize and destroy every thing that can support life. If we are not protected we lose all." Many Edgecombe residents suffered from food and provision shortages. Clark explained that his county "has contributed freely and without stint to the core army and to the interior counties and RR companies of our own state…so much grain and bacon has already been sent off."[69] Besides food, Edgecombe sent a number of slaves to vulnerable counties, provided clothing and shoes for soldiers throughout the state, and raised monetary donations for cities overrun by Union forces.[70] With an increasingly aggressive enemy so close in proximity, Edgecombe residents worried for their survival.

By mid-July, Edgecombe County braced for impact as rumors spread that Union forces led by Brigadier General Edward E. Potter began advancing toward the intracoastal

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[68] No title, Wilmington *Daily Journal,* July 25, 1862, 2.

[69] Henry T. Clark and petitioners to Gov. Vance, April 9, 1863, Zebulon Baird Vance, Governors Papers, SANC.

[70] Turner and Bridgers, Jr., *History of Edgecombe County*, 232-235; "Patriotic and Commendable," Raleigh *Weekly Standard,* October 30, 1861, 3; "For the Southerner," Tarboro *Southerner,* June 11, 1864, 3.

region. Superior Court justice George Howard wrote to his wife from Edgecombe, "I am as busy as a bee preparing for the coming of the Yankees. I believe they will certainly be here this Fall, probably this summer," unaware that Union forces had already made their way into the county.[71] Just days before Potter arrived in Edgecombe, Tarboro's newspaper, the *Southerner*, foreshadowed the coming raid: "In the onset [the Yankees will] let loose their dogs of war upon us, with a yell and a confidence in our subjugation." Writing in apocalyptic terms, the paper proclaimed, "They have ignored and have violated all the rules of Christian warfare –they have burned and sacked cities without due notice to unoffending and innocent citizens – they have pillaged towns and have wantonly destroyed private property." The editor continued, "They are endeavoring to incite a servile insurrection." Tapping into the county's deepest fears, the writer accused Union forces of "encouraging the slaves of the South to murder their lawful masters, their wives and their children…The Yankees have it in their power to prevent [these evils], and we hope they will, but we fear, that it is hoping against hope."[72]

On July 23, the Third New York Cavalry entered Tarboro and Rocky Mount, pillaging homes, stores, and burning the cotton mills and plantations of the county's leading producers. Confederate soldier A.J. McIntire reported, "they burned every Cotton Gin they came to on their route. They preserved every wagon and team they came to, and took all the best horses and mules out of the stables, on which they mounted negroes, most of whom

[71] George Howard to wife, July 14, 1863, George Howard Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, East Carolina University Library, Greenville, N.C., accessed at https://web.cortland.edu/woosterk/pot_raid.html.

[72] "Yankee Barbarity," Tarboro *Southerner,* June 13, 1863, 2.

went along voluntarily." Worse yet, McIntire reported that one of the companies consisted of "buffaloes," commenting, "let everybody remember this, and they will know how to treat the members of company I, if they are captured."[73] Another report stated that Union soldiers entered the home of former Governor Henry Clark, robbing his wife of her jewelry and other family valuables.[74]

As the prospects of victory dimmed in 1864, North Carolina Confederates became more aggressive in their tactics. In February, rebel forces attacked New Bern, attempting to retake the city and push Union forces off of the coast.[75] Although they failed to retake the port-city, a small detachment of Confederate troops led by General George Pickett captured several members of the Union's Second North Carolina Regiment. Through the end of February, Confederates hanged twenty-two of the men as traitors in Kinston, specifically targeting those that had been formerly in the Confederate service. The soldiers did not simply execute the Union soldiers, but tortured them. They denied the men food, stripped them of their clothing, and robbed the victims' grieving families as a display of terror to southern traitors.[76] Rather than alienating locals from the Confederacy, the brutal execution of these men pushed people further from their loyalty to the Union. Just one month later, twenty-eight native North Carolinians fled their regiments in the Union army, enervated by fear after hearing of the mass hangings. Locals and families of Union soldiers began feeling neglected

[73] A.J. McIntire, "For the Journal," Wilmington *Journal,* July 30, 1863, 2.

[74] "Yankee Honesty," Raleigh *Spirit of the Age,* August 24, 1863, 4.

[75] "From Eastern North Carolina," Raleigh *Weekly Standard,* February 10, 1864, 1.

[76] No title, Tarboro *Southerner,* March 19, 1864, 3; Browning *Shifting Loyalties,* 164.

by their occupiers. They had initially supported the Union cause largely for the promise of safety and security. The Kinston hangings and constant harassment from rebel guerillas on the hinterlands of coastal counties made many rethink their loyalties.[77]

On April 20, Confederate forces under the command of General Robert F. Hoke captured the city of Plymouth in Washington County, less than forty miles north of Union-occupied Washington.[78] With access to the Albemarle Sound and on the heels of Beaufort County, Union Brigadier General Edward Harland ordered the city of Washington to be evacuated on the 30th. As Union soldiers prepared for the evacuation, they set fire to the small marina, Havens Wharf. According to a member of the Forty-Fourth Massachusetts Regiment, "this was to destroy the naval stores, cotton, etc., to prevent falling into hands of the Confederates." Little did the soldiers know what damage they caused. The fire consumed the marina and quickly spread through Main Street in the heart of the city. Panicked Washington residents fled, attempting to gather as many personal belongings as they could carry before the fire consumed their homes. One local woman, Winnie Balance, died in her efforts. The Methodist, Catholic, and Presbyterian churches burned, along with the black Methodist church.[79] As the fire blazed through the city, Union soldiers commenced plundering the town, taking valuables, food, and personal belongings from homes and shops. One resident recalled, "nothing of what we left in our home did we ever see again…the

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[77] Browning, *Shifting Loyalties,* 164-165.

[78] "The Battle of Plymouth," and "The Capture of Plymouth," Fayetteville *Semi-Weekly Observer*, April 28, 1864, 3.

[79] Charles F. McIntire, "When the Yankees Set Fire to the Town of Washington," in *Washington and the Pamlico,* 49-51. McIntire was a member of the 44th Massachusetts and was present in Washington throughout most of the occupation period.

Yankees shipped north all they wanted and what they did not care for was given to Negroes of the town."[80]

The burning of Washington and the subsequent plundering of the city elicited strong reactions in the region. Union General Innis N. Palmer sharply condemned his soldiers for their actions: "It is well known that, during the late evacuation of Washington, N.C., that town was fired, and nearly, if not entirely consumed, thus wantonly rendered houseless and homeless hundreds of poor women and children." More shocking to Palmer, "the army vandals did not even respect the charitable institutions, but, bursting open the doors of the Masonic and Odd Fellows Lodges, pillaged them both and hawked about the streets the regalia and jewels." Palmer ordered that his message be read aloud to every regiment under his command for ten consecutive days, until the guilty parties turned themselves in and received a discharge.[81] For the thousands of coastal residents that had lived under occupation for several years, these acts were inexcusable and only served to fuel the native white rejection of Union occupation. One Wilmington paper aptly summarized the feeling in saying, "this act of the Yankees furnishes a striking commentary upon Federal occupation...[the burning of Washington] adds one more page to the record of this war, upon which the historian will inscribe the damning evidence of Yankee atrocity and barbarism."[82]

The Civil War would drag on for another grueling year, keeping coastal North Carolinians in a state of military occupation. For a region that proved to be conditional in its

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[80] Annie Blackwell Sparrow, "Recollections of the Civil War," and Charles F. Warren, "Washington During the Civil War," in *Washington and the Pamlico,* 44, 63.

[81] "A Yankee Confession," Tarboro *Southerner,* June 18, 1864, 4.

[82] "From Washington, N.C. – Atrocious Vandalism of the Yankees," Wilmington *Daily Journal*, May 7, 1864, 2.

support for either the Union or the Confederacy, the experience of Federal military occupation cemented coastal residents' loyalty to the secessionist party. This shift in allegiances stemmed from the fact that anti-Confederate sentiment had always been a conservative ideology. Local Unionists supported the government of 1860—a Federal system that protected slavery, state's rights, and the social order. Military occupation, however, revealed a new Union that brought sweeping changes to southern society. Black freedom, employment, education, and heavy-handed Union policies proved too radical for many and alienated much of the population. By the end of the conflict, Unionist sentiment waned significantly, and those teetering somewhere in the middle swung into the Confederate camp. One Union soldier foreshadowed this shift, "There is no Union sentiment here. About all are either silent or growling most of the time."[83]

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In October 1865, the American Missionary Association consulted Reverend Horace James, working in New Bern for the Freedmen's Bureau, about his missionary work and the goals of reconstruction. "What we wish to do is plain enough," he responded. James wrote hopefully, "We desire to construct the colored people of the south to lift them up from suffering and helplessness into a dignified independence and citizenship." After working toward this goal for several years, however, James disappointingly learned that white southerners "hate the ideas of the North as much as ever, and will yield to them no further than they judge to be politic and helpful of their chances to resume power and control in the land." The northern "ideas" James spoke of referred to granting black residents the rights and

[83] Isaac N. Roberts to Dr. Ebenezer Hunt, July 19, 1862, in Browning, *Shifting Loyalties,* 158.

privileges of a free citizen – the right to vote, own a firearm and land, and to utilize the civil courts. As these ideas came to fruition, James noted, "[whites] boldly declare that when our troops are withdrawn they will drive out all these Yankee notions, and still keep these people a servile race." He concluded, "The South is conquered, but their minds are not changed."[84] Indeed, as Union military forces slowly began withdrawing troops from the coast and the state began working toward reentering the Union, local communities became a violently contested arena for local governance. Former Confederates and those that switched their allegiances during the war defended their communities from what they saw as a radical transformation of their society. On the coast, thousands of newly freed blacks migrated to the formerly occupied region, attempting to secure the rights and privileges that emancipation afforded them. As a consequence, former Confederates attempted to systematically suppress these freedmen and women, while shutting out those that retained their Unionist beliefs from economic and political participation.

When the news came that General Robert E. Lee's army had surrendered, coastal residents rejoiced over the end of hostilities. The region's remaining Unionists reacted optimistically, hoping that the Confederacy's defeat would give them political authority over their communities. In New Bern, locals flew the American flag over several public buildings and paraded the streets. One man mockingly dressed in imitation of "Bobby Lee," while hundreds crowded the city square "drunk with joy."[85] At the end of April, residents and

[84] Horace James to American Missionary Association, October 20, 1865, in Jacob Kahler, "Educating the Freedmen During the Civil War: Letters from Beaufort and New Bern, North Carolina, 1863-1865" (M.A. Thesis, Appalachian State University, 2019), 125-126.

[85] "City Intelligence," New Bern *Times,* April 18, 1865, 2.

leading citizens of Beaufort assembled in a mass meeting to grieve the recent assassination of President Lincoln as well as express their hopefulness for reconciliation. The meeting's organizers felt "proud to see men from every section under a common flag, rallying around the standard of a common country." In their view, North Carolinians had been "dragged out of the Union and forced into the rebellion," but with peace, "the work of reconciliation may be accomplished through the united efforts of the honest and worthy men of every party."[86] Nearby in Washington, 700 citizens from Beaufort and Pitt counties met in the city to celebrate the end of the war, believing that secessionists "received their lasting quietus by the results of the rebellion, and been deprived of the power to do further harm."[87] For the region's Unionists, the future looked promising.

While coastal whites assembled in celebration over the end of the war, recently freed slaves, deserters, refugees, and parolees traveled across the state to return home or find new ones. The crowds of migrants caused much anxiety throughout the region as crime and lawlessness tended to follow them. These impoverished travelers could sometimes steal food or horses on their journey, or engage in small skirmishes and violence. More alarming, however, was that many of these refugees consisted of freedmen and women. Most of them traveled to the coast to seek out military protection, or to reunite with family members that had made their way to the region during the war.[88] Military overseers well knew the potential consequences of such an influx of blacks and refugees. In an attempt to prevent chaos, they

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[86] "Public Meeting in Beaufort, Carteret Co., Raleigh *Daily Standard,* May 2, 1865, 2.

[87] "A Union Meeting in Beaufort County," New Bern *Times,* May 16, 1865, 2.

[88] Mark Bradley, *Bluecoats & Tar Heels: Soldiers and Civilians in Reconstruction North Carolina* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009,) 27-30.

issued a series of general orders in late April and early May. General Orders, No. 32 confirmed the legality of emancipation to remove any doubt "which seems to exist in the minds of some of the people," about the state of slavery. Speaking to the arrival of thousands of freedmen to different localities, military officials issued General Orders, No. 46 to establish guidelines "for the government of Freedmen." The order encouraged black residents to avoid idleness and essentially work for their former masters temporarily until "by industry and good conduct they may rise to independence and even wealth."[89]

The postwar migration of freed people, as well as the tremendous loss of white men caused by the war, altered the social demographics of the coast significantly. Between 1860 and 1870, many coastal counties experienced drastic losses in white population, while the black population soared. Craven County whites, for example, outnumbered blacks by nearly two to one in 1860. Ten years later, the white population dropped by 5,468 while the black population increased by over 4,500, resulting in black residents significantly outnumbering whites in the county throughout the postwar period. One observer noted in 1866, "Newbern has the reputation of being a perfect little Africa – soil, climate and negroes."[90] A similar trend occurred in Edgecombe. Although slaves and free blacks had outnumbered whites in 1860, the black population increased by nearly 5,000 over the decade, while the white population dropped by over 500. By 1870, the black population nearly doubled the white population.[91] Without the institution of slavery exhibiting strict social control over black

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[89] "Important Orders," Raleigh *Daily Standard,* May 25, 1865, 1.

[90] "Notes on the Wing," New Bern *Times,* September 12, 1866, 1.

[91] *1860 U.S. Census,* Population Schedule, Beaufort, Carteret, Craven and Edgecombe co. N.C. (Washington D.C.: National Archives), accessed at https://www.census.gov; *1870 U.S. Census,* Population Schedule, Beaufort, Carteret, Craven and Edgecombe co. N.C.

residents, these dramatic changes tapped into some of the deepest fears of white coastal residents.

Although much of the state reluctantly accepted the consequences of Confederate defeat, devoted secessionist counties like Edgecombe remained combative. In October 1865, Provisional Governor William W. Holden held a convention vote to rid the state constitution of its slavery and secession ordinances. The convention was the first requirement given to the southern states by Congress to reenter the Union. Edgecombe County, along with four other cotton-producing counties, rejected the proposed anti-slavery ordinance and rejected the secession repeal by just two votes, defiant acts of protest by unrepentant rebels.[92] Edgecombe residents also showed their disdain for federal Reconstruction by boycotting the 1866 Fourth of July celebration. Local Unionist F.L. Bond noted, "the Radical Secesh in this community are so much opposed to the Fire Works, that I have abandoned having them."[93] A secessionist sympathizer explained the boycott: "we have no independence to celebrate today, and such as may attempt it, it's only in name and a cheat on time and the ignorant. We are this day under the heel of a military despotism conflicting with the civil laws of the State." Foreshadowing the county's stance throughout Reconstruction, he commanded:

(Washington D.C.: National Archives), accessed at https://www.census.gov; Of this sample of counties, only Beaufort County saw an increase in the white population, while the black population dropped by nearly 2,000. In Carteret County, the black population increased by only 613, but their white population plummeted by nearly 3,000.

[92] "Official Vote on the Ordinance Abolishing Slavery and the Ordinance Annulling the Ordinance of Secession," Raleigh *Weekly Standard,* January 3, 1866, 2; The only other counties that rejected the anti-slavery ordinance were Camden, Currituck, Duplin, and Pitt.

[93] "To the Public," Tarboro *Southerner,* June 30, 1866, 2.

"make no more concessions to get into the Union. Come life or death, submit to no more test oaths to destroy the only inheritance left our children – Honor!"[94]

Coastal whites remained content only when they had a grasp on social relations based on white supremacy. From the outset of Reconstruction, local planters tried to retain their former slaves on cotton plantations through sharecropping agreements. In early 1866, Tarboro's *Southerner* reported that "the cotton planters of Edgecombe have generally succeeded in hiring their freedmen as laborers, for the cultivation of cotton." The planters offered a wage of $13 per month, allowing the laborers to live on the land.[95] As long as black residents remained at the discretion of white landowners, race relations stayed relatively calm. The *Southerner* congratulated their conforming black residents in June, noting, "the Freedmen in this and the adjoining counties, are performing their respective labors and fulfilling their contracts equally as well if not better than was expected. This is to their credit." Problems arose, however, when freed people did not accept these demands. The paper continued, "we regret to say however it is not so much so with the women, a good many of them seem disposed to do nothing…we urge upon all industrious and worthy Freedmen to use their best endeavor to make their respective families do their part."[96]

With their newfound status as citizens, however, African Americans throughout the coastal region did not always settle for plantation labor. In Beaufort, freedmen and women took to education as a means of uplifting their status. These eager residents utilized the many

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[94] "For the Southerner: At Home, July 4, 1866," Tarboro *Southerner,* July 7, 1866, 2.

[95] "Encouraging," Tarboro *Southerner,"* January 20, 1866, 4.

[96] "A Word to Freedmen," Tarboro *Southerner,* June 30, 1866, 2.

benevolent societies that operated in the region to achieve this, and in one school, over 600 black students enrolled. The New Bern *Times* observed, "the freedmen of the South evince a growing interest in the education of their children. Everywhere among them teachers testify to their zeal in securing the advantages of the school."[97] These efforts by black residents, and the aid given by white charitable institutions, angered coastal whites. In April 1866, the New York *Times* editor traveled to New Bern, where similar progress had been made toward black education, where he noted the hostility given by local whites. The sheer number of blacks living in the city impressed him: "I have not visited any Southern town, except Richmond…where there are so many colored persons as there are here." He also found "scores of persons, opposed to every attempt to regenerate the African race," that openly mocked black education efforts. "[They] are very fond of declaring there is no future of its sable sons; that they will perform compulsory labor only," the editor continued. To these hostile whites, black education was one of many "useless endeavors for reform."[98]

Whites argued that the Civil War's uprooting of the coastal social order led to a sharp rise in crime, and used this claim to confirm racial prejudices. As early as January 1866, local newspapers reported an abundance of crime on the coast, and many flooded the Governor's office with similar complaints. Craven County resident William Foy informed Governor Jonathan Worth that in his neighborhood "the peaceable and inoffensive inhabitants…have been so terror stricken…by bands of robbers and armed desperadoes as to render it utterly impossible for them to remain at their homes in safety." According to Foy, most of these

[97] "Education Among the Freedmen," New Bern *Times,* September 12, 1866, 1.

[98] New York *Times*, "New Bern," in New Bern *Times,* April 13, 1866, 4.

outrages occurred outside of the city limits of New Bern, where there were few soldiers or police. Foy blamed local blacks for the increase in crime, pointing to soldiers that recently mustered out of service. "Having become accustomed to get their living without labor during their service in the army," he concluded, "they doubtless feel no inclination to resort to labor to secure a living so long as they can obtain it by blundering the unprotected inhabitants living within their reach."[99]

The purported rise in crime stoked the flames of already tumultuous race relations in the region. The editors of the New Bern *Times* felt that the supposed widespread lawlessness of freedmen proved their anti-Reconstruction suspicions, declaring "a great many persons imagine that the freedmen, if left without federal protection, would be oppressed and greatly abused. We don't believe a word of it."[100] Edgecombe County residents blamed the rise in criminal acts to the influx of black migrants to the region. Tarboro's *Southerner* argued, "it is bad policy to import freedmen from distant parts, and place them upon plantations in the county…If evil minded freedmen are brought among us …they will certainly exercise a corrupting and demoralizing influence."[101] Owing to the common southern belief that local whites knew the best interest of their black residents, former Confederates often blamed Unionists and Republicans for ruining the peace of the region. "In olden days North Carolina was noted for the quiet and security in her borders, but her records today show a painful departure from this time honored reputation," reported the *Southerner.* The writer continued,

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[99] William Foy to Gov. Worth, January 20, 1866, Jonathan Worth, Governors Papers, SANC.

[100] "Extensive Bumming by the Negroes," New Bern *Times* in Tarboro *Southerner,* January 20, 1866, 2.

[101] "More Theft – The Rogues Caught," Tarboro *Southerner*, April 7, 1866, 2.

"the only and true solution can be found in the teachings of the Radical party…encouraging by their doctrines the perpetration of acts on the part of a favored class."[102]

Union Colonel John W. Forney saw things differently. After the war, Forney traveled across the South, recording his observations of postwar progress for the northern press. While passing through New Bern, Forney saw crime perpetrated by whites too: "Men who, at the beginning of the late civil war, claimed to be gentlemen, have become so depraved and degraded as to steal horses, and even blankets, from negroes who are endeavoring to support themselves by honest industry." Crime could also be indiscriminate, as Forney noted that the criminals "have become a terror to all classes, white and black, rebels and Unionists." He acknowledged that freedmen could be prone to criminal behavior, but explained that "the sudden liberation of the negroes at the close of a long civil war, in spite of their masters' efforts to hold them in bondage, has in like manner demoralized them to a considerable extent, and they, too, are prone to vagabondism, violence and crime." The main point of difference, however, was that "the negroes are sure to be punished, while the whites very often escape unwhipped of justice."[103]

To combat the pervasive lawlessness afflicting the coast, former Confederates formed violent, quasi-guerilla "vigilante" organizations. In the early days of Reconstruction, predating the Ku Klux Klan, coastal whites organized into groups known as "Regulators." They derived this name from a pre-Revolutionary War group of piedmont farmers that fought

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[102] No title, Tarboro *Southerner,* December 19, 1867, 2.

[103] Colonel James W. Forney in "Radical Account of the State of Affairs in North Carolina," New Bern *Weekly Journal of Commerce,"* November 6, 1866, 6.

injustices carried out by colonial officials.[104] The Regulators consisted of small groups of armed white men that sought to intimidate and abuse blacks and white Unionists. The existence of the Regulators was hardly a secret, however, as Conservative newspapers often touted their work and encouraged the formation of more companies. In an October 1866 article covering the burning of a cotton gin in New Bern (presumably by freedmen outlaws), the editors of the *Journal of Commerce* asked, "when will these outrages be stopped," proclaiming, "a company of Regulators would be of service. Who will raise it?"[105] The Raleigh *Sentinel* spoke more carefully about the group's existence, but declared, "If there be gangs abroad now, other than [the Regulators] it will be found to consist of men who had to resort to…self-defence and to intimidate and keep down negro desperadoes."[106]

As the *Sentinel* suggested, the Regulators honed their attacks on the black population. In December 1866, the New York *Herald* wrote about the "gloomy account of matters in the Old North State," reporting that "the Regulators are at work cleaning out Yankees and negroes…Another Northerner was shot, and negroes are shot and hung every day in the eastern part of the State."[107] Indeed, earlier that year a gang of Regulators stormed Washington in Beaufort County, killing a black man and severely injuring a white Unionist. The sheriff arrested three of the outlaws, but they later escaped the local jail and headed to nearby Greenville in Pitt County. On their way, however, the men murdered another black

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[104] Bradley, *Bluecoats & Tar Heels,* 100-101.

[105] "Another Outrage," New Bern *Journal of Commerce,* in Wilmington *Daily Dispatch,* October 31, 1866, 1.

[106] "Outrages in the East," Raleigh *Sentinel,* November 13, 1866, 2.

[107] New York *Herald* in New Bern *Weekly Journal of Commerce,* December 18, 1866, 3.

man and injured a second. Officials in Beaufort County complained that almost no effort had been made to stop the marauders and that they often bragged at their ability to evade capture.[108]

Despite violent overtures from coastal Conservatives, the work of Reconstruction carried on, primarily through the work of the Freedmen's Bureau. The Bureau's primary responsibilities entailed aiding refugee blacks with food, shelter, and provisions, along with seeking employment and justice for violent crimes and unpaid wages.[109] Hence, the work of the Bureau became widely unpopular on the coast, even among white Unionists that felt the aid to blacks supplanted their needs. In some places, locals accepted the organization's presence. The Reverend Horace James, for example, applauded the citizens of Beaufort County who "treated me with uniform kindness" and never "uttered in my hearing a discourteous word, or committed an ungenerous act."[110] In Edgecombe County, however, the Freedmen's Bureau quickly lost its standing within the community. From 1865-1868, a Colonel Savage oversaw the county's Bureau office and established friendly relations with the locals. In 1868, however, Captain Fred De Silver succeeded him and did much to anger local whites. In one instance, Moses Mordecai, a freedman, stole from his overseer, Joshua Bullock. The planter took matters into his own hands, and whipped the man. De Silver had Bullock arrested and sent to prison in Raleigh, a punishment deemed tyrannical by local whites. Captain De Silver also brought with him a group of northern missionaries with the

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[108] Bradley, *Bluecoats & Tar Heels,* 100.

[109] Bradley, *Bluecoats & Tar Heels*, 35-36, 84.

[110] Horace James, no title, Raleigh *Daily Standard,* February 20, 1866, 3.

purpose of educating the local freedmen. They set up shop at the home of Dr. S. N. Harrell, but they abandoned the mission entirely by the end of 1868 due to the fact that locals ostracized both the bureau officials and the missionaries.[111]

The Freedmen's Bureau alienated many coastal Unionists whenever they judged that the organization was perverting its duties. President Andrew Johnson's generous pardons for wealthy former Confederates who applied for amnesty forced the Freedmen's Bureau agents to return their property, putting many secessionist leaders back in control of local affairs. In Plymouth, just north of Washington, local Unionist J.H. Rea penned a letter to Pennsylvania congressman Thaddeus Stevens, complaining about the Bureau's actions. During the war, Rea and his Unionist neighbors abandoned their homes and property and headed to Union lines to escape Confederate persecution. He remarked that after the war "leading Rebbles [sic] since taken Johnson Oath talk of punishing men with as mutch presumtion [sic] as if thay had bin as Loyle as Mr. Lincoln." Facing poverty and harassment, Rea complained that the Freedmen's Bureau had returned land back over to leading Confederates at the expense of the impoverished Unionists in his neighborhood. "I do not think its is wright," he lamented, saying that former rebels should not "be placed on an eaqueal footing with those who had to leave thare homes and had all taken from them." For Rea and other disgruntled Unionists, they saw these measures as being done at their expense: "I could site you to a dozen cases whare union men has been turned out of dorse by those freemens agents and the Farms

[111] Turner and Bridgers, *History of Edgecombe County,* 238-239; Joshua Bullock's harsh punishment may be owed to the fact that he had similar violent encounters with freedmen. In September 1866, he reportedly fractured the head, leg, and arm of Anthony Smith. See: "A Grave Complaint," New Bern *Times,* September 8, 1866, 1.

turned to Rebbles." He reminded Stevens of the sacrifice that Unionists had made, declaring plaintively, "It Cost something to be Loyle here."[112]

In the spring of 1867, when Congress wrested control of Reconstruction from President Johnson, Republicans instructed the Freedmen's Bureau to begin appointing county registrars under strict terms. The new standard required a registrar to be able to take the Test Oath—which required a profession of previous unfailing loyalty to the Federal government, and therefore excluded former Confederates and much of the wartime elite. For each county precinct, two whites and one black must be appointed. County officials throughout the coast flooded Governor Worth's office with complaints about the requirement. In Beaufort, James Rumley "found great difficulty in selecting suitable persons to act as Registers [*sic*] in Carteret *who can take the required oath*." Still holding his racial prejudices, Rumley wrote, "it may be proper, at this time of political amalgamation of races for me to state that the Board I recommend are all *white* men."[113] Former Governor Henry Clark wrote from Edgecombe that "there is not a *single* citizen in Edgecombe who can read or write that can take the prescribed [oath] except Northern citizens."[114] From Beaufort County, F.B. Satterthwaite "learned no decent white man has consented to serve on the board with negroes." Frustrated at the new requirements for the office, Satterthwaite ended the letter in saying, "our people down here are all deserving of getting back into the Union…We want

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[112] J.H. Rea to Thaddeus Stevens, January 9, 1866, in James A. Padgett, ed., "Reconstruction Letters from North Carolina: Part 1: Letters to Thaddeus Stevens," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 18, no. 2 (April, 1941): 174-175.

[113] James Rumley to Gov. Worth, May 1, 1867 (emphasis in original), Jonathan Worth, Governors Papers, SANC.

[114] Henry T. Clark to Gov. Worth, May 1, 1867, Jonathan Worth, Governors Papers, SANC.

once more *complete civil* government."[115] The enforcement of biracial offices as well as the disenfranchisement of the antebellum elite doubtless pushed coastal residents further into the Confederate camp.

The Freedmen's Bureau, if not rallying the support of local whites, did much to embolden the local black population. With the aid of the Bureau, Edgecombe County blacks organized into Union Leagues of America (ULA), a Republican organization that cropped up throughout the state after the war. Although a peaceful group in much of the state, Edgecombe's Union League took a more militant form for defense of their community. Just like the Regulators, the Edgecombe ULA often turned to violence, especially against their former masters, stealing property and burning farms. However, unlike the white Regulators, the ULA members faced legal repercussions. In the December 1866 session of county court, three-fourths of all criminal cases filed involved black members of the ULA. The March 1868 court docket consisted of 100 cases, every single one of them against freedmen, many affiliated with the ULA.[116] The legal intimidation served its purpose. In June 1868, a group of freedmen from Battleboro, near Rocky Mount, denounced the League and forfeited their membership. They explained, "we do not wish or intend to be held responsible or culpable for any act or outrage committed by said League in the future." They well understood that the public reputation of the ULA as well as their own race was in jeopardy.[117]

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[115] F.B. Satterthwaite to Gov. Worth, May 11, 1867, Jonathan Worth, Governors Papers, SANC.

[116] Turner and Bridgers, *History of Edgecombe County,* 245.

[117] "Deserting the Leagues," Tarboro *Southerner,* June 18, 1868, 3.

The continued activity of the Union League throughout Edgecombe, however, continued to stoke racial fears. In Tarboro, a large group of ULA members met and drilled as a militia company. Local white newspaper editors sounded the alarm in October 1868: "the negroes are drilled constantly…the Leagues drilled through the streets regularly; the officers, many of them, had swords, and the privates had bludgeons." The Tarboro *Southerner* spared no time in concocting a political conspiracy. Just one month out from the presidential election, the *Southerner* claimed that Provisional Governor William W. Holden and Republicans fomented a racial conflict: "this Radical Governor [Holden] is proceeding deliberately and quietly, to execute its provisions and to organize this military force." The editors predicted that if the Democratic and anti-Reconstruction candidate, Horatio Seymour of New York, won the election and thwarted Holden's plans, then "they are resolved to make war!"[118]

The hysteria surrounding the majority-black Union Leagues stemmed directly from Republican gains in 1868, primarily their approval of a new state constitution. The proposed constitution would rewrite the penal code, establish public schools, and make several county offices electable positions. Most offensively, however, any taxpayer could serve on juries or run for office, effectively ending the antebellum tradition of elite deference in the South.[119] These provisions outraged whites, mainly because they allowed blacks to be involved in local politics, but also because in several coastal counties black voter registration would likely be significantly higher than white totals. In Craven County, for example, only 1,822 white

[118] "Radical Scheme of War and Treason!" Tarboro *Southerner,* October 1, 1868, 2.

[119] Bradley, *Bluecoats & Tar Heels,* 170-173, 181.

residents registered compared to 2,940 black voters. Similarly, 2,593 black residents voted in Edgecombe compared to only 1,194 whites. These staggered numbers gave way to a lopsided victory for the Republican Constitution. In Carteret County, white voters outnumbered their black counterparts, and the results of the vote resulted in the rejection of the new constitution, revealing that where white voters had the majority, Republican measures usually failed.[120] For coastal whites, it seemed their voice in local affairs had been drowned out by Radicals and blacks.

The final push back from conservative whites came through the organization of the Ku Klux Klan. As early as October 1868, Carteret County Republicans reported that the "rebel Ku Klux" began canvassing for Horatio Seymour as president by "vilify[ing] every good man who refused to vote" for him. The "rebel band of 'lost cause' mourners" traveled through New Port and Beaufort, giving "abusive and disgusting harangues" toward the Federal government.[121] Although no reports of the Klan emerged in Edgecombe by 1868, the *Southerner* began hinting toward it. Still plagued by lawlessness, the paper's editor suspiciously noted, "if a spirit of retaliation has manifested itself among the opposition by an occasional act of revenge, it is no more than we could expect." Seeing Klan dens forming in other counties, the writer continued, "it is a matter of great wonder that the *lex talionis* [law of retaliation] has not been more often applied by a people who have been driven almost mad."[122] Two months later, however, the paper explicitly recommended the use of the Klan

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[120] "Registration Returns," Raleigh *Daily Standard,* November 5, 1867, 2; "The Election in North Carolina," Raleigh *Daily Standard,* May 5, 1868, 2.

[121] "Matters in Carteret," Raleigh *Weekly Standard,* October 14, 1868, 2.

[122] No title, Tarboro *Southerner,* September 20, 1869, 2.

in Edgecombe, saying, "let the summary action of Lynch Law be called into requisition, even though the actors in the just retribution be styled Ku Klux, Traitors, or any other 'disloyal' epithet."[123]

By 1870, a Ku Klux Klan den formed in Edgecombe to directly combat the Union League. Though never proven, residents suspected that the Tarboro *Southerner's* editor, William Biggs, was himself a member of the Klan. Following his advice, the Edgecombe Klan began utilizing brutal suppression tactics. In one instance, Klansmen detained eleven black men suspected of assaulting white women and burning property and took them to Hendrick's Creek, one mile from Tarboro. The Klan leaders also took several local black office holders with them to witness the cruel punishment. At Hendrick's Creek, the party of disguised men emasculated the eleven victims in front of the politicians. The act terrified the officials so much that they fled the county outright, heading for Washington.

The Klan also targeted white Unionists. Writing from New Bern, E.A. Smith wrote to Union General Benjamin Butler, "the Union people White and Black had Reather [sic] be ruled by Northren People, than to be ruled by Southren rebels," since "the feeling from The rebels towards the Union people are just, as biter this day as they Was in 1861."[124] In 1871, matters worsened, "in regards to the Ku Klux of North Carolina…a Union Man is Not Safe in these States," since the "Ku Klux is the Proken [sic] elements of the rebels of the late

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[123] "Is There No Remedy?" Tarboro *Southerner,* November 18, 1869, 2.

[124] E.A. Smith to Hon Benjamin F. Butler, August 12, 1867 in James A. Padgett, "Reconstruction Letters from North Carolina: Part IX: Letters to Benjamin Franklin Butler," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 20, no. 1 (Jan. 1943): 75.

War."[125] In Carteret, former Union soldier and North Carolina native Elijah S. Smith echoed a similar concern to Butler: "Since the close of the War with the South, I have had a hard time of it, for the fact that we were doubed [sic] with the title of Buffalows." Due to the presence of the Klan, "the Cessesionist [sic] got temporarily in power…Consiquently we have been Very much oppressed."[126] By 1869, the Klan had gained a foothold in Beaufort County as well, spreading their terror among successful black residents throughout the coastal region[127]

By 1871, many coastal residents had enough of the tumultuous politics of Reconstruction. With the Ku Klux Klan intimidating and suppressing voters everywhere, Democrats made substantial gains in the 1870 elections. Raleigh's Republican paper, the *Standard*, solemnly wrote, "we have lost some Counties by bare majorities, while others have gone by default entirely. The necessity of a thorough reorganization is apparent."[128] The failed elections for Republicans, however, was not a matter of organizational problems. Due to the spike in political terrorism from the Klan and the government's inability to stop them, Republican voter turnout dropped by 13,000. Hence, Conservatives won six of seven congressional seats and in ten of the fifteen counties swept by that party, Klan activity had

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[125] E.A. Smith to Major Gen. Butler, March 20, 1871 in James A. Padgett, "Reconstruction Letters from North Carolina: Part IX: Letters to Benjamin Franklin Butler," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 20, no. 4 (Oct. 1943): 348.

[126] Elijah S. Smith to Hon B F Butler, February 15, 1869 in James A. Pradgett, "Reconstruction Letters from North Carolina: Part X: Letters to Benjamin Franklin Butler," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 20, no. 2 (April, 1943): 171.

[127] "Another Ku-Klux Outrage," Wilmington *Post,* October 31, 1869, 1.

[128] "City and State," Raleigh *Weekly Standard,* August 24, 1870, 3.

been rampant.[129] From 1870 onward, Conservative power continued to strengthen, and secured the work of redemption.

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North Carolina's coast provides unique insights into the political culture surrounding the Civil War. In an economically diverse region, coastal counties had varying degrees of political loyalties, always subject to change. Although cotton producing counties like Edgecombe rarely waivered in their support for the Confederacy, communities based on other forms of production - manufactured goods, fishing, and mercantilism - had more complex allegiances. Many coastal communities initially staked their interest in local concerns, rather than the southern nationalism that swept much of the Deep South. While initially supporting moderation and the preservation of the Union, few locals could contain the excitement of war after Lincoln's call to put down the rebellion. When the hardships of war set in, however, many rethought their loyalties, and sought a return to peace and Union. As Union forces entered the coastal region and began a prolonged period of military occupation—something that neither residents of the mountains or piedmont experienced during the war—native whites saw that the Union they once supported was not the Union that would emerge from the war. Their experience of Reconstruction began in 1862. Perceived Federal abuses and overtures to newly freed blacks alienated most coastal white residents so that by the end of the war, a pervasive cynicism toward the Federal government existed throughout the region. By the end of the decade, the few remaining Unionists on the coast rejected the Reconstruction governments. To them, the Federal government supplanted their interests in favor of African Americans, could not stop the widespread lawlessness in

[129] Bradley, *Bluecoats & Tar Heels,* 229.

the region, and pushed for the social equality of the races. On the coast of North Carolina, Reconstruction, beginning during the war, became the story of race relations, something no political allegiance could easily transcend.

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